

THE PATH TO PARTICIPATION? THE AGGREGATE AND
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL EFFECTS OF THE NATIONAL VOTER
REGISTRATION ACT

By

DAVID HILL

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EFFECTS OF THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL VOTER
REGISTRATION ACT

By

David Hill

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Chairman: Michael Martinez
Major Department: Political Science

This dissertation examines the impact of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). The law more commonly known as 'motor voter' sought to increase levels of registration and voting by requiring states to allow citizens to register to vote when they acquired or renewed a driver's license or vehicle registration, through the mail, or at public agencies such as AFDC and disability offices. This project is an in-depth examination of the reform on state-level turnout and the social composition of the electorate in the 1996 elections.

Using 1996 Current Population Survey data the project explores the law on two levels of analysis. First, at the aggregate level, I examine the effect of the reform on overall state level turnout and the level of participation inequality

between education, income, age, and racial groupings in state electorates. Second, at the individual level, I examine the probability that an individual from a particular social group would register under a given NVRA method of registration and then I examine the probability that an individual from a particular social group would vote once registered under a given method of registration.

The results of the project suggest that the NVRA had no significant impact on overall levels of state turnout, while slightly exacerbating participation inequality between income and education groups. In terms of age differences, the reform appears to have resulted in a modest mobilization of younger citizens. There was no significant effect on the tendency of white Americans to comprise of greater share of the voting age population than racial minorities, although the individual level analysis suggests that mail-in registration was successful at registering hispanics at greater rates than whites, and public agency registration was successful at registering both blacks and hispanics at greater rates than whites.

The findings of this project reflect the short-term effects of the NVRA on turnout and the social composition of the electorate. However, the project does suggest that at best the future of the NVRA may be no effect at all, and at worst, the law may increase the bias in American electoral politics toward those already most likely to participate.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names, more than the humble sons of obscure and unpropitious fortune. The electors are to be the great body of the people of the United States.

James Madison, Federalist #57

At the time of the writing of *The Federalist Papers* the electors in the United States were not the great body of people of the nation. In fact, by law in all states the franchise was only extended to white, male property owners (Lane, 1959; Kleppner, 1982).¹ Thus, when this democracy was born the right to choose elected representatives was only extended to a privileged segment of society. More than two hundred years later, almost all of the legal restrictions on electoral participation have been removed, yet our elected representatives are elected continually by nonrepresentative segments of the population. The voting public in the United States tends to be skewed toward those with higher levels of socioeconomic status, whites, and older Americans (Burnham, 1987; Piven and Cloward, 1988; Leighly and Nagler, 1992; Franklin, 1996).

The present biases in electoral participation are illustrated in Table 1-1, which compares the education, income, racial, and age distributions in the 1992 electorate

¹ See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the historical development of the franchise and the legal context of electoral participation.

to those in the voting age population. These data suggest the electors of the United States continue to be skewed away from marginal groups. Individuals from the two highest educational categories comprise a greater share of the voting population than they do of the voting age population, while individuals from the lowest two educational categories comprise a smaller share of the voting population than they do of the voting age population. The pattern is the same for income groups. Individuals from the highest levels of income comprise a greater share of voters than they do of the voting age population while individuals with the lowest levels of income comprise a much smaller share of voters than their share of the voting age population. The voting electorate is clearly skewed toward those of higher socioeconomic status.

While there have been important strides forward in bringing about the inclusion of racial minorities into the electoral process, the data in Table 1-1 indicate that the voting population is still skewed toward white Americans. Whites comprise a modestly higher proportion of the voting population than their share of the voting age population, while blacks and hispanics both comprise smaller shares of voters than their respective shares of the voting age population. Finally, the voting population is skewed toward older Americans. Individuals forty-five years and older make up a substantially greater proportion of voters than they do the voting age population while individuals between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine make a much smaller proportion of voters than they do of the voting age population.

Table 1-1
Group Share of the Voting Age Population

	<i>Percent of Voters</i>	<i>Percent of Voting Age Population</i>
<High School	12.3	17.8
High School	32.9	35.8
Some College	28.2	25.8
BA	17.6	13.8
Advanced Degree	9.0	6.7
<\$10,000	9.6	13.5
\$10,000-\$19,999	16.2	18.7
\$20,000-\$39,999	32.9	32.8
\$40,000-\$74,999	29.3	25.4
\$75,000 and Above	12.1	9.6
Whites	84.6	81.6
Blacks	9.9	11.3
Hispanics	3.7	4.9
18-29	17.7	23.0
30-44	33.1	33.0
45-64	30.2	26.9
65 and Above	19.0	17.1

Source: 1992 Current Population Survey

Clearly, in the first presidential election of this decade the president and all other representatives elected that year were chosen by a body of electors skewed toward individuals of higher socioeconomic status, whites, and older Americans. While there are questions as to whether the unrepresentativeness of the electorate matters (Teixeira, 1992), the data presented here do beg the question as to how to include low participation groups into electoral politics in the United States. Increasing overall levels of income and education would solve the problem. Unfortunately, that solution essentially entails eliminating social inequality in the

United States, which is a goal we have yet to achieve. We can, however, make the legal context of participation more facilitative (Powell, 1986; Franklin, 1996), which could bring about the inclusion of low participation groups, such as those of lower socioeconomic status, racial minorities, and the young.

The most recent effort at creating a more facilitative legal context in the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), which has been hailed by some as the most comprehensive attempt to further democratize electoral politics in the United States since the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The law signed by President Clinton on May 20, 1993, is intended to increase the size of the overall population of registered citizens by making the opportunity to register to vote as convenient as possible.

The NVRA contains three provisions which are intended to directly effect overall levels of registration. First, the law requires states to offer citizens the opportunity to register, or update their registration (change of address, or party affiliation) when acquiring or renewing a drivers license or picture identification. To add to the convenience of this procedure, the citizen's application for a drivers license (including renewals) could also act as the registration application unless the applicant fails to sign the voter registration application. Highton and Wolfinger (1995) point out that the actual language of the law is vague as to whether the drivers license and voter registration applications could be achieved with the use of the single combined form, although the option was certainly left open for states by the

omission of specific instructions within the language of the law (Highton and Wolfinger , 1995).

Second, states were required to offer citizens the opportunity to register (or update their registration status, in the case of a change of address or change of party affiliation) through the mail, with an application which required no witness or notarized verification of the citizen's identity. Mail-in registration applications were to be made available through the mail and at other governmental and private entities. Particular emphasis was placed on making them available for organized registration drives.

The law also required states to offer the opportunity to register at all offices in the state that provide public assistance and all offices in the state provide state-funded programs primarily engaged in providing services to persons with disabilities (PL 103-31, 1993). Thus, states were required to provide clients of state-aid offices such as AFDC, WIC, and disability offices the opportunity to register to vote and provide assistance to the visitor in filling out the application form, if necessary. In addition to the mandated designation of state agencies as voter registration locations states were also required to designate at least one additional state agency as voter registration offices. These offices could include public libraries, public schools, offices of city and county clerks, fishing and hunting license bureaus, government revenue offices, and unemployment compensation offices (PL 103-31. 1993). Armed

service recruitment offices were also included in this section of the law as voter registration agencies.

The NVRA exempted those states which either had no registration system (North Dakota) prior to March 11, 1993, or had procedures in place which allowed citizens to register at the polling place on the day of election by March 11, 1993. Two states, Minnesota and Wisconsin,² had election-day registration programs in place prior to the designated date and were therefore exempt from the law. Idaho, New Hampshire, and Wyoming all chose to adopt and implement election day programs prior to the March 11, 1993, deadline and were therefore exempt from the law (Human Serve, 1996). The exemption of these six states (Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) left 44 states and the District of Columbia affected by the reform.

The fourth and final major provision of the NVRA was the prohibition of purging or removal of citizens from lists of registered citizens for not voting. The law states that a citizen cannot be removed from the registration rolls unless the elections officials provide written confirmation that the individual has moved outside the jurisdiction of the registrar or fails to respond to a written notice from the registrar or fails to participate in two general elections following the date of the notice (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). Alternatively, states may identify residents who

²Maine also has election day registration. However, the system is not statewide and therefore the state is not exempt from the NVRA (Human Serve, 1996).

have moved using the Postal Service's National Change of Address (NCOA) program. This is a computer file with information of approximately forty-million citizens who voluntarily notify the post office of recent moves. The file is updated on a daily basis and the postal service maintains information for three years following a move. While an elections official can remove a citizen from the list of registrants based on this information, if the citizen moves within the same jurisdiction the citizen must be automatically re-registered at his or her new address (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995).

The NVRA, then, contains four provisions which seek to influence the size of the registered electorate. The three provisions providing for motor vehicle, mail-in, and public agency registration attempt to increase the proportion of citizens registered to vote by making the act of registration fairly convenient. The provision prohibiting the removal of citizens from registration lists for nonvoting, on the other hand, attempts to maintain the size of the registered population.

Supporters of the law hoped that by increasing the size of the registered population turnout levels would also increase by virtue of the increased numbers of registered citizens. This optimism is predicated on the belief that one of the major factors in creating low turnout in the United States is the system of restrictive registration barriers. Prior to the NVRA, a citizen who wanted to register to vote in most states would have to take the time to travel to the elections office to place his or her name on the registration roles. Needless to say, this individual would have to

have knowledge of the requirement of having to register to vote, in addition to the time and ability to travel to the elections office. Under this type of system, then, the responsibility for establishing eligibility to participate in elections is placed solely on the shoulders of the individual citizen, and registration can therefore be viewed as a barrier placed between the voter and the voting booth.

Contrast this process with that of most European states, in which the citizen's name is placed on the registration lists by the government (excluding France) by government officials upon reaching the prescribed voting age (Powell, 1986). Rather than the citizen being forced to bear the onus of registration, the state bears the responsibility for registering the citizen and thus takes registration out of the decision calculus and consequently reduces the costs of participating in elections.

Because of the difference in registration requirements in the United States and Europe, many students of participation argue that a general liberalization of American registration laws resulting in a voting process similar to the one in Europe would result in a substantial increase in overall levels of turnout in the United States (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Powell, 1986; Teixeira, 1992). By increasing the numbers of registered citizens, then, one might expect that the NVRA would result in higher levels of turnout.

Additionally, one might also expect that because the effect of restrictive registration requirements tended to skew the registered toward those of higher socioeconomic status (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980), the relaxation of restrictive

procedures should result in the inclusion of more individuals from low-participation groups such as the poor and racial minorities into the electoral process. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) argued that restrictive registration procedures had the greatest effect on those of lower socioeconomic status. Because many of these individuals possessed lower levels of education they might find the requirement of having to deal with a bureaucracy intimidating and thus refrain from registering to vote. Furthermore, individuals of low socioeconomic status are less likely to possess the resources such as time or transportation which would allow them to be able to travel to the elections office to place their name on the list of registered citizens (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980).

Registration requirements are believed to have the greatest impact on those individuals who move on a fairly regular basis. The requirement of having to re-register every time an individual relocates to another precinct can prove to be a burdensome task and therefore tends to reduce the probability of registering among frequent movers. Many individuals of lower socioeconomic status move on a fairly regular basis and are therefore confronted with the requirement of having to re-register after every move. The interaction then between socioeconomic status and residential stability exacerbates the negative effect of restrictive registration requirements on those individuals on the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass, 1987).

Finally, individuals of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to possess socio-political attitudes which are conducive to political participation and highly related to the probability of registration. Individuals with lower levels of income and education tend to have lower levels of political efficacy, lower levels of interest in politics, and lowers levels of partisanship. All three of these important attitudes concerning the political world are positively related to the probability of registering to vote (Jackson, 1996). Due to their lower levels of these crucial attitudes, lower-status individuals are less likely to take the time to overcome the registration barrier because they simply do not have the desire to participate in the political process.

Another group targeted by supporters of the reform is young Americans. The participation rates of individuals under the age of thirty is very similar to that of individuals on the lowest end of the socioeconomic spectrum (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). Restrictive registration procedures are also thought to have a negative impact on the participation rates of young Americans. Young individuals are more likely to be frequent movers and they are (as with lower-status individuals) less likely to possess high levels of socio-political attitudes conducive to political participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). Because of these factors many young Americans may refrain from registering to vote because they believe the requirement to register prior to voting not worth the effort to overcome.

By attempting to place the opportunity to register to vote in as many convenient locations as possible (motor vehicle offices, through the mail, social

service agencies, for example), the NVRA reduces the costs of participation by essentially making the act of registration effort free. Because of this, supporters of the reform believed that the implementation of the law on a nationwide scale would result in increased numbers of individuals from target groups such as the young, the poor, and racial minorities registering to vote, and we would subsequently witness an increase of the proportion of these groups in the voting electorate.

With the passage, signing, and implementation of the NVRA, students of electoral participation have been given the opportunity to witness an ongoing natural experiment on the effectiveness of reducing restrictive procedures on overall levels of turnout and the ability of such reforms to transform the social composition of the electorate. In the post-NVRA era there are many questions to address concerning the impact of the reform. Will the implementation of NVRA result in increases in the number of registered citizens? Will the reform result in greater numbers of lower socioeconomic status individuals, racial minorities and young Americans becoming part of the registered electorate? Will the low turnout levels characteristic of American elections increase as a result of the NVRA? Will the law result in a reduction in the tendency of groups such as middle class Americans, older citizens, and whites to vote at rates much higher than those lower status, racial minorities and young Americans? In order to gain a full understanding of the impact of registration reform it is crucial that we address these questions.

The problem in attempting to gain a full understanding of the impact of the NVRA is its recent implementation. While many states had varying levels of NVRA type programs in place and there has been some informative and important research done using these states (Calvert, 1997; Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Knack, 1995; Rhine, 1995; 1996) the implementation of the NVRA creates a uniform system of registration across all states and thus provides the context to examine the reform on a national level. However, we only have one election (1996) in which we can gauge the effect of the law, and therefore any conclusions we might draw from analyses should be qualified as only short-term effects. In fact, when one examines one of the most important electoral reforms of the twentieth century, the Nineteenth Amendment, one finds that short-term effects did not really reflect the long-term results. For instance, following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, turnout rates among eligible voters dropped dramatically, because although women were given the right to participate in elections, most chose not to. Across the twentieth century, however, the turnout rate among women has continuously climbed until today women vote at slightly higher rates than men (Kleppner, 1982). In short, the history of the Nineteenth Amendment warns us that there may a substantial lag time before electoral reform is truly successful, and thus short-term results should be viewed with caution.

While we may not be able to gain any scientific certainty about the long-term impact of the NVRA, by examining short-term effects in 1996 we gain insight into

the possible long-term effects by conducting an in-depth examination of the reform in the 1996 elections. The goal of this project is to examine the impact of the NVRA in 1996 on levels of turnout as well as the impact of the reform on the social composition of the electorate with the hope of providing insight into the possible long- term effects of the reform on American electoral politics.

Chapter 2 of the project explores the history and development of the use of registration laws in the United States. The rest of the project is devoted to the examination of the impact of the NVRA in 1996. The analysis will proceed on two levels. First, using the state as the unit of analysis I examine the effect of the reform on aggregate levels of turnout and the social composition of the electorate. Therefore, Chapter 3 examines what the effect of the implementation of the NVRA procedures on state level turnout. Chapter 4 is devoted to the examination of the impact of implementing NVRA procedures on the social composition of state electorates. In this chapter I ask did the implementation of the NVRA procedures result in a reduction in the income, education, age, and racial biases in state electorates.

The second part of the project examines the impact of the law on individual level voting behavior. Using 1996 Current Population Survey data, I examine the probability of an individual registering under a given procedure (for instance, a motor vehicle office) and the probability of an individual voting once registered under one of these procedures. After a discussion of the differences between the acts of

registration and voting and a description of the data and methods used in the individual level analysis (Chapter 5), Chapter 6 focuses on the probability of registration across social characteristics such, as income, education, age, race, gender, and length of residence, as well as across method of registration. The final step in the analysis is to determine what happens after an individual is registered to vote. Thus, in Chapter 7, I examine the probability of voting in 1996 after an individual has registered. As with the registration analysis I examine the probability of voting across social characteristics and registration method.

The strategy of the project to examine the impact of the reform on both the aggregate and individual levels should provide us with more confidence in the results of the project. The two-level focus allows us to view the impact of the NVRA through separate lenses. At the aggregate level I can examine the effect of the law on overall patterns of participation. Examining any changes in state-level turnout or the social composition of state electorates provides insight into overall impact of the reform as any future effects of the reform on aggregate levels of electoral participation.

However, in order for electoral reforms such as the NVRA to have an impact at the aggregate level, they must affect the behavior of individuals. By focusing on individual level behavior I can examine the probability that an individual of a particular social category would register under a given NVRA procedure and also the probability that an individual of a particular category would vote once registered.

This analysis allows us to determine what impact the law had on particular groups and what patterns of registration and participation among social groups will result from the long-term implementation of the reform.

CHAPTER 2

A HISTORY OF RESTRICTION AND RELAXATION

As noted the NVRA attempts to affect electoral politics in the United States by easing restrictive registration requirements. In fact, one of the main goals of the reform was to create a uniform system of registration procedures across all states and the District of Columbia.¹ This standardization of registration laws would put an end to the uneven system of voluntary registration in which some states had very liberalized registration systems similar to, if not more facilitative, than what the NVRA mandated,² others had some type of registration reform in place, and many states could only be described as restrictive with no form of relaxed registration procedures and lengthy closing dates.

In fact, the legal context of electoral participation has always varied from state to state. As Kleppner (1982) notes, the Constitution expressly delegated the power to designate voter eligibility requirements to the states, while reserving to Congress the right to establish or alter voter eligibility requirements. Because of this, each state was allowed to determine who could and who could not vote, and thus the

¹ This uniform system excludes the six states which were exempt from the law.

² Minnesota for instance prior to the NVRA had an active motor voter program in which motor vehicle bureau staff prompted visitors whether not they wanted to vote, an active agency-based program, and mailin program which required no form of verification on the part of the applicant, and election-day registration.

inclusiveness of electoral politics varied across the states. While federalism prevented the creation of a coherent and uniform set of voter eligibility requirements, there were certain standards which were widely accepted in the early years of the republic. Prior to the Revolution seven states required an individual to own land in order to vote and the other six required verification of personal property or a tax payment. Following the revolution eight states relaxed their property and tax requirements but none completely eliminated economic tests for the franchise (Lane, 1959; 11; Kleppner, 1982: 7-8). These requirements could only be met by white males, and thus the great body of people Madison referred to in Federalist #57 in practice consisted of solely white, male, property owners.

From this foundation of exclusive politics in which the "great body" of the population (women, blacks, Native Americans, non-property owning white males, aliens) were not allowed to participate in elections, the history of nineteenth-century electoral politics is one of expansion of the suffrage to excluded groups and increases in the level of electoral participation. The first extension of suffrage was through the elimination of the property or economic requirement. While historians make much of the elimination of the property requirement for white males by the 1820s, as late as 1828 fourteen states still had some form of property or taxpaying requirement, and laggard states such as Connecticut, Louisiana, and New Jersey did not extend the franchise to all white males until the 1840s (Lane, 1959; Kleppner, 1982). While turnout surged during this era, increasing from 26.9% in 1824 to 78.9% in 1848

(Bibby, 1896: 26), the increasing role of party organization and mobilization may have been more of a causal factor behind higher turnout levels than the extension of franchise. For instance, when New York abandoned the tax-payment requirement in 1827 turnout increased by one-percent (Lane, 1959: 11). Nonetheless, the extension of the suffrage right to non-propertied white males was crucial to this explosion of democratic participation.

As many states experienced increases in the amount of European in-migration alien suffrage became an important issue in the political debate. Eastern states with large numbers of immigrants in the cities responded by limiting the right to vote to United States citizens, although many of these requirements were modified to allow naturalized citizens the right to vote after a proscribed period of time (Lane, 1959; Kleppner, 1983). The experience in the Great Lakes region was much different than in the eastern states. As large numbers of alien Europeans migrated to the midwest states such as Wisconsin (1848) and Michigan (1850) both extended the right to vote aliens who stated an intent to become citizens. Eight other non-southern states (all in the midwest and west) also extended these extensions of suffrage as did seven southern states following the civil war (Kleppner, 1982).

While European ethnic minorities may have been brought into the electoral process during this period of time, this era was one of exclusion for blacks. In the south electoral participation among blacks was not an issue. Free blacks escaped to free-states while slaves were obviously denied the right to vote along with all other

rights of citizenship. In the border states, however, where most free blacks resided, political leaders expressly prohibited blacks from voting, as did most newly admitted states in the midwest and west (Lane, 1959). In fact, by 1830 almost all nonsouthern states had explicitly written "white" into the voting eligibility requirements (Kleppner, 1982), although notably a half a dozen New England states did not expressly prohibit black participation.

The Civil War of course resulted in a change in the legal structure of black participation. In 1867 Congress mandated through legislation that the former Confederate states extend the franchise to blacks, and the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment constitutionally verified the right of black Americans to participate in electoral politics (Kleppner, 1982). Thus in the span of a few years the legal situation of blacks, in terms of the franchise, was transformed from legal exclusion from the electoral process to a constitutionally guaranteed right. By and large the Civil War amendments settled the question of black suffrage in northern states. However, in the south the *de jure* guarantee of the franchise had very little effect on practical electoral politics.

Once the Union armies left the former Confederate states, political and social elites set about disenfranchising black Americans. In part this was made relatively easy by the former slaves apathy toward the political world and lack of any political experience. At first, much of the exclusion of blacks from the voting booth revolved around coercion, violence, and fraud. (Lane, 1959; Kleppner, 1982; Piven and

Cloward, 1988) Although, this system of exclusion though intimidation was successful at dramatically reducing the proportion of blacks participating in elections, there is some evidence to suggest that moderate numbers of blacks were able to continue to vote when the opportunity arose (Piven and Cloward, 1988). Thus, as southern states regained control of the apparatus of government they turned to more institutional forms of exclusion. (Lane, 1959)

The main form of exclusion at this time was to attach conditions to the franchise which would not violate the Fifteenth Amendment, but could not be met by blacks. This was not, however, a unified and coherent disenfranchisement of the black population. It was rather a varied and evolving effort on the part of individual states. (Piven and Cloward, 1988). In 1877, Georgia simply reinstated its poll tax left over from the days of the tax payment requirement. In 1882, South Carolina followed by Florida in 1889, adopted an eight box law which required citizen to place separate ballots in boxes marked for each of the individuals candidates. This requirement made voting for illiterate individuals an almost impossible feat.

By 1894 Mississippi, Florida, and Tennessee implemented poll taxes and literacy tests, which effectively excluded most blacks and poor whites. Piven and Cloward (1988) argue that following the "populist scare" of 1896 many southern states moved to either implement poll taxes and/or literacy tests to strengthen the requirements where they already existed. Obviously, poll taxes and literacy clauses, while intended to disenfranchise blacks, also excluded poor whites from the electoral

arena. In an effort of re-enfranchise poor whites who had been excluded many southern states adopted loopholes to allow whites who could not meet the literacy or financial requirements to participate in elections. Thus, "good character" clauses allowed elections officials to make exceptions to the stringent registration requirements, or "grandfather clauses" which allowed individuals whose ancestors had voted or fought for the Confederacy to register to vote (Piven and Cloward, 1988: 83). Despite the efforts to include, or at least appease, poor whites, the effect of literacy tests and poll taxes was to effectively disenfranchise the black population and many poor whites in the south. This system of exclusion in the South remained in place until the Twenty-fourth Amendment (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965) prohibited exclusionary measures such as literacy tests and poll taxes (Kleppner, 1982).

Nonsouthern efforts at restricting suffrage, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while not as blatant as the white primary, were nonetheless effective and directed at particular segments of society. For instance, northern states, like their southern counterparts, adopted literacy tests with the intention of eliminating the opportunity for Europeans to participate in elections due their inability to speak the English language. In fact, eleven northern states imposed literacy requirements between 1890 and 1926. Seven nonsouthern states increased the length of their residency requirements. While these "reforms" were certainly directed at immigrants and lower class groups, they were not greatly successful at

excluding these groups from the voting electorate (Kleppner, 1982; Piven and Cloward, 1988).

Piven and Cloward (1988) note that the inability of these efforts to exclude less than desirable groups from the electoral process in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be explained by two factors. First, local party organizations were determined to mobilize these voters into the voting booth whether they were literate or not. Second, without an institutional mechanism for implementation and enforcement these rules could not have an effect on the shape of the electorate. A system of voter registration served this end, while also providing officials the flexibility to selectively administer rules and requirements thus making it more difficult for some groups and individuals to vote while making it much easier for others (Piven and Cloward, 1988; 88). The imposition of registration procedures (and other institutional reforms such as the Australian Ballot) also resulted from the belief that some type of control over the electoral process was needed in order to prevent widespread voting fraud (Rusk, 1970; Converse, 1972)

Thus, requiring individuals to personally register to vote before being allowed to participate in elections became had become the central form of voter eligibility requirement in nonsouthern states.³ In fact, by 1920 thirty-one nonsouthern states had some type of personal registration requirement in place, although as with most

³ The personal registration was not a new idea in 1920. Massachusetts had a registration requirement in 1800, and many states experimented with this type of requirement throughout the nineteenth century (Piven and Cloward, 1988).

eligibility requirements the strength of the law varied from state to state (Kleppner, 1982: 60), and by 1929 only Arkansas, Texas, and Indiana had not instituted registration procedures, although these states also eventually adopted this requirements (Piven and Cloward, 1988, 88).

The imposition of the personal registration requirement by states signaled a shift in the responsibility for establishing a citizen's eligibility to vote from the state to the citizen. Because of this, the costs of participation were increased dramatically, and turnout dropped dramatically during this period. While there is disagreement as to the exact impact of registration requirements on turnout in this period, Kleppner (1982) and Burnham (1974) both estimate that in counties with stringent registration requirements turnout declined approximately thirty percent. The decline in turnout in this period was not evenly distributed across socioeconomic categories. The increase in the costs of electoral participation due to the registration requirement skewed the electorate toward those most engaged with the politics and therefore most likely to overcome the barrier of the registration requirement (Kleppner, 1982, 60). Those individuals who were only marginally engaged with the political world but who might be mobilized in the latter days of the campaign were unable to do so because they were not on the registration lists. The long-term of impact of registration innovation was to create an electorate composed of those individuals most likely to participate in elections and to exclude those not willing or able to overcome these barriers (Kleppner, 1982, 60).

At the same time lower class whites and racial and ethnic minorities were being excluded from the electorate through legal restrictions the movement toward extend the franchise to women was gaining strength. In the last decade of the nineteenth century Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho gave the franchise to women. By 1918, eight states had extended the franchise to females and of course in 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified and formal discrimination in the polling place based on sex was eliminated (Kleppner, 1982: 9).

The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment signaled the end of a period of great change in the legal structure of electoral participation in the United States. Through reforms such as the personal registration requirement and literacy tests, the active electorate was essentially limited to those of higher socioeconomic status, and thus the contemporary social composition of the electorate began to take shape. The Nineteenth Amendment, on the other hand, signaled the direction of reform in years to come. By prohibiting the exclusion of women from the electoral process, although not successful at mobilizing women initially (Kleppner, 1982), the Nineteenth Amendment did expand the eligible electorate and set the stage for further expansion of the electorate in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Voting Rights Act and Beyond: Further Expansion

As discussed earlier, southern states in the late nineteenth century had enacted a system of exclusionary voting laws which effectively excluded African-Americans from the political process for much of the twentieth century. Cracks began to appear

in the wall of exclusion toward the end of WWII. In *Smith v Allright* (1944) the Supreme Court outlawed the white primary (Lane, 1959: 15). In the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) the court set the legal precedent for tearing down legal segregation in the south. In the early to mid-sixties the court, in a series of cases, undermined apportionment schemes to advantage rural southern districts and to dilute the value of the African-American vote (Kleppner, 1982: 115).⁴ The process of dismantling the de jure system of the political disenfranchisement of African-Americans was well under way by the mid 1960s.

The attack on the politics of exclusion in the south also took place in Congress. Congress passed three Civil Rights Acts between 1957 and 1964. The first established the Civil Rights Commission and mandated federal protection against the denial of the franchise to blacks. The most powerful and famous of the laws, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 insured equal access to public accommodations, employment opportunities, educational institutions, as well as the right to register to vote for African-Americans (Jones, 1985: 66). Nineteen-Sixty-four also saw the ratification of the Twenty-Fourth Amendment which banned the use of poll taxes in federal elections.⁵

An institutionalized system of exclusion is not likely to die easily, and although blacks had been given the de jure right to participate in elections, they

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the cases and issues involved see Engstrom (1985).

⁵ The Supreme Court outlawed the use of poll taxes in state and local elections in *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* (1966).

nonetheless had to do so in the face of violence. Voter registration drives were met with violent police resistance, and many northerners committed to ensuring African-Americans the right to vote were murdered (Edwards, 1985: 4). The publicity of the murders and the violent reaction of the police to voting rights protesters spurred the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The law passed in 1965 and amended in 1970, 1975, and 1982 was arguably the most powerful and comprehensive voting rights legislation since Reconstruction. The law was first drafted to apply specifically to the southern states such as Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, and North Carolina, which were the most blatant in their efforts to deny African-Americans the right to vote. This was to be accomplished by a formula which made the law applicable to those states and local jurisdictions which used some form of requirements for eligibility such as literacy or good moral character tests, and in which less than 50% of the voting age population was registered to vote by November 1, 1964, or less than 50% actually voted in the 1964 presidential election (Jones, 1985: 66-67).

The two key provisions of the law were Section 4 which prohibited the use of discriminatory tests such as literacy and moral character tests, and Section 5 which required the targeted southern states to submit all electoral changes to the either the District Court for the District of Columbia or the United States Attorney-General for approval. The law also included provisions to provide federal examiners to monitor implementation of the law (Sections 3 and 6), as well as provide fines for violation

of the law. In sum, the Voting Rights Act was a major step forward in the dismantling of the system of exclusionary politics, and extending the franchise to all racial minorities (Edwards, 1985; Jones, 1985).

One would have to argue that the effect of the Voting Rights Act was very positive in its initial years in its effect on black registration and voting. For instance, in 1960 only 29.1% of southern blacks were registered to vote, by 1965 that proportion had increased to 35.5% and by 1967 the proportion of southern blacks who registered to vote climbed to 57.2% (Kleppner, 1982: 116). In some states such as Mississippi the effect on registration was quite dramatic. Between 1964 and 1976 black registration in Mississippi increased from 29,000 individuals in 1964 to 286,000 in 1976. This is an eight fold increase. (Edwards, 1985: 5). It is not understatement to say the Voting Rights Act had a very positive impact on black registration in the South.

The impact on voting rates among blacks was also quite dramatic. Between 1952 and 1960 the average turnout for southern blacks in presidential elections was 12.7%. The average turnout in presidential elections for southern blacks between 1964 and 1980, however, was 53.6%. The Voting Rights Act certainly produced a dramatic long term change in the voting rates of African-Americans in the South. The law also had the effect of reducing the skew in turnout rates between blacks and whites in the South. When we control for socioeconomic status, the turnout rates for blacks were eleven points lower than whites in 1964. In the 1968, 1972, and 1976

elections southern blacks actually voted at higher rates than whites when we control for socioeconomic status (+14.9, +11.5, +12.4 respectively), although blacks did slip relative to whites in the 1980 election (Kleppner, 1982: 117).

The implementation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a powerful example of how changes in the legal structure of participation can have positive effects on the participation rates of particular groups. However, the impact of the law on the turnout rates of southern blacks is certainly accentuated by the almost complete exclusion of blacks from the electoral process prior to the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The next major expansion of the eligible electorate came six years after the Voting Rights Act with the ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment (1971) and the inclusion of the 18-20 year olds into the electoral process. In contrast to the positive effects on turnout resulting from the Voting Rights Act, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment resulted in lower turnout levels. Kleppner (1982) argues that the addition of 25 million 18-20 year olds into the eligible electorate can account for about twenty-five percent of the national turnout decline between 1968 and 1972. While this impact decreased with time, the result is the same, the addition of a low (if not lowest) participation group into the eligible electorate resulted in lower levels of turnout because most of these individuals did not participate in elections when given the opportunity to do so.

**From State Experimentation to Federal Law:
The Development of Agency Based Registration**

The next major adjustment to the legal structure of participation in the United States came with the passage and implementation of the National Voter Registration Act. Arguably the most comprehensive electoral reform since the Voting Rights of Act of 1965, the law was the result of eighteen years of state experimentation with various reforms attempting to make the act of registration and voting easier for American citizens. The most well known of these reforms, motor vehicle registration, was first instituted in 1975 in Michigan. Realizing that registration was fairly burdensome requirement, then Secretary of State Richard Austin implemented the nation's first motor voter program in which citizens were prompted to register by office staff when they visited the driver's license bureau (Knack, 1995; Rhine, 1995; Solop and Wonders, 1995).

While Michigan was the first state to implement an active program, Wisconsin began making registration applications available in public agency offices as early as 1973 (Solop and Wonders, 1995). Both California and Pennsylvania followed Wisconsin's lead by implementing passive agency-based programs in which registration applications were made available in the offices of public agencies. By the end of the 1970s then four states had some form of "convenient" agency based program in place.

During the 1970s other forms of convenient registration reforms were implemented by various states. North Dakota eliminated the registration requirement

in 1973 and between 1972 and 1976 Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin adopted election day registration in which citizens were allowed to register to vote on the day of the election (Fenster, 1994; Solop and Winters, 1995). In fact, in 1977 President Carter presented a proposal for national same day registration, although the bill never made it through Congress (Smith, 1977). Additionally, in 1977 the state of Ohio also instituted an election day registration program which was later overturned by a citizen initiative (Smith, 1977).

Texas implemented the nation's first mail-in registration program in 1941 (Solop and Wonders, 1995) and during the 1970s twenty other states also implemented mail-in programs in which citizens were allowed to register to vote through the mail (Knack, 1995). As with most state reforms the restrictiveness of these mail-in programs varied from state to state. Some states required the citizen to do nothing more than to fill out the application and return it through the mail, while other states required the individual to return the application with notarized verification of identification (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Knack, 1995).

The move toward comprehensive registration reform picked up steam in 1983 after Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward authored an essay in *Social Policy* calling for a "class based realignment." (Piven and Cloward, 1983). The authors argued that "two-thirds of the disenfranchised" (Moss, 1993) were poor and low-income Americans and the best way to counter the policies of the Reagan administration was the mobilization of this group of citizens. The most effective

method for doing this was to mobilize (register) these citizens where they were easiest to contact: social services agencies. This would be aided by the tendency of most social service professionals to be supportive of human service programs and thus likely to be willing to help any efforts with the intention of saving the social welfare state (Piven and Cloward, 1983; Moss, 1993).

Human Serve, the group formed to push forward this type of movement, enlisted the support of many prominent associations such as Planned Parenthood, the YWCA, public employee unions, and professional social work unions. Unfortunately, the sheer complexity of coordinating a multiplicity of different agencies toward the same goal, and the obvious sensitive political nature of actively trying to mobilize particular sectors of society created a range of implementation problems. In fact, by the end of 1984 over 1500 agencies which had voluntarily begun offering clients registration opportunities had placed the names of only 275,000 people on the registration rolls (Moss, 1993).

Compounding the difficulty of successfully establishing this agency-based registration movement, was the fact that even if agencies offered the opportunity to register there were still state registration laws to adhere to, such as lengthy residency requirements and lengthy closing dates. This, nationally oriented movement, therefore had to work within the myriad of registration laws across the federal system. Human Serve and its supporters also used the federal system to its advantage. Rather than attempting to mobilize the social service community, the

group turned its attention to institutional reform, and initially the movement sought out sympathetic governors, mayors and county officials to issue executive orders mandating that workers in government agencies offer clients the opportunity to register. This plan won endorsement from the National Association of Secretaries of State, the National League of Cities (Moss, 1983).

In fact, friendly governors in major states like Texas, Ohio, and New York signed executive orders establishing agency-based programs. The impact of these orders was diluted by the Reagan Administration's threat to cut off grants-in-aid to any state which used any amount of these funds to pay employees engaged in registration activities. These three states chose to continue to offer the opportunity to register at public agencies but only by making the registration application available in office space, rather than prompting the client whether or not he or she wanted to register (Moss, 1983). Nonetheless, the idea of convenient agency based registration began to grow in popularity and in the late eighties a series of Democratically controlled state legislatures passed "motor voter laws" similar to Michigan's (Moss, 1983). Thus, by 1987 nine states (AK, AZ, CO, MI, NC, OH, PA, VT, WA) had implemented motor vehicle registration programs (Knack, 1995).

In 1988 the move toward a comprehensive national registration law entered the halls of Congress. In April and May of 1988 the House of Representatives House Administration Committee held hearings to consider House bills proposing the national implementation of mail-in registration, election-day registration, and registration in government and private sector agencies (Solop and Wonders, 1995).

In 1989, Senator Wendell Ford (D-Ky) and Representatives Al Swift (D-Wa) and Bill Thomas (R-Ca) introduced companion bills in both houses, together known as the National Voter Registration Act of 1989 (Dimas, 1990: 347). Although, the original proposals included provisions for a national system of election day registration, the final bill (HR 2190) reported by the House Administration Committee and passed by the entire House on February 6, 1990, excluded this controversial measure. The bill passed by the House did, nonetheless create a more uniform system of registration in the United States by mandating that all states allow citizens to register to vote when they acquire or renew a drivers license, through the mail, or at public agencies such as AFDC offices. The bill also prohibited states from removing citizens from registration lists for nonvoting (Dimas, 1990).

While the 1989 bill had the support of many House Republicans, such as Newt Gingrich, the Democratic majority nonetheless had to pass the bill over Republican opposition and a veto threat from President Bush. One effort on the part of the Republicans was an amendment put forth by minority leader Bob Michel (R-TX) to strengthen the anti-fraud provisions in the bill and to make the implementation of these procedures voluntary. The voluntary provision of the Michel's amendment was obviously intended to kill the bill or at least to weaken it to point of having no force in terms of the implementation (Dimas, 1990).

Opponents of the bill, led by Michel, argued that the registration was the realm of state governments not the federal government, and that the NVRA was a

violation of this. Additionally, Michel, with support from the White House, argued that the bill would simply be too costly to implement for many state governments, in addition to arguments that the relaxation of registration requirements was invitation to fraud (Dimas, 1990). Nonetheless, the House successfully passed the bill on February 6, 1990 by a margin of 289-132. Sixty-one Republicans crossed party lines to support passage (CQ Quarterly, 1990: 414)

At the time of passage many supporters believed the chances of the reform being signed into law were fairly high. Most believed the reform would pass the Senate. Speaker of the House Thomas Foley (D-WA) went as far as saying "I would be surprised if the president would veto legislation to make it possible for more citizens to vote." (Dimas, 1990: 410). While the Senate version of the bill was reported by the Rules Committee, Senate Republicans effectively killed the NVRA when a cloture vote to end the Republican filibuster failed 55-42, five short of the required sixty votes to cut off debate on September 26, 1990 (CQ Almanac, 1990: 71). Two Republicans, Mark Hatfield (R-OR) and Bob Packwood (R-OR), voted to end debate. Two Democrats Howell Heflin (D-AL) and Max Baucus (D-MT) were voted to oppose cloture (CQ Almanac, 1990: 72).

After being frustrated by the successful obstruction of the Senate Republicans in 1990, House sponsors in 1991 (still led by Swift (D-WA)) opted to sit by and wait for the Senate to either pass or kill the 1991 version of the NVRA (CQ Weekly Report, 1991: 3585). The success of the reform thus, fell on the shoulders of Senate

Majority Whip Wendell Ford (D-KY). On April 24, 1991 the Senate Rules Committee approved S-250, 7-4 with Mark Hatfield (R-OR) the only Republican supporting the bill.

Immediately following the approval of the Rules Committee, Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-KS) and Ted Stevens (R-AK) reintroduced S-921 which would provide states with block grants for registration reform and would make implementing NVRA procedures voluntary. As with the 1990 House amendment, S-921 would essentially rob the NVRA of any substantive power to create a uniform system of registration reform. (Sammon, 1991: 1055). As the S-250 moved to the floor the Republicans once again filibustered the bill. On July 18, the second Democratic attempt at cloture of the day fell one vote short when David Pryor (D-AR) missed the vote due to a heart attack. Once the again the Republicans presented a strong front against cloture with only Hatfield (R-OR), James Jeffords (R-VT) and Dave Durenberger (R-MN) the only Republicans to vote to cut off debate (Sammon, 1991: 1981).

In 1992 the House once again waited for the Senate to act on the reform. The story in the Senate was different than the previous two attempts at passing the NVRA which were stymied by Republican filibusters. On May 7, 1992 the breakthrough occurred when a cloture vote passed successfully by a 61-38 vote. From this point the bill could now move forward toward a final vote. However, amendments were still allowed to be presented, when a cloture vote to limit amendments failed 58-40.

Amendments put forth by Bob Kasten , R-WI (Federal standards on state liability laws) and Phil Gramm, R-TX (Crime Bill Package) temporarily stalled the bill (Sammon, 1992: 1336).

After an agreement to consider only germane amendments to the bill the Senate successfully defeated a series of Republican amendments to kill or weaken the bill on May 19. Finally, on May 20 the Senate successfully passed S-250 by a vote of 61-38. While this essentially guaranteed the bill would be sent to the president, the margin fell short of the 67 votes needed for the two-thirds veto proof margin (Sammon, 1446). On June 16, the House as expected overcame Republican obstruction attempts and passed the bill 268-153, which was thirteen votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to override a veto (Palmer, 1992:1795).

On July 3, 1992 President Bush followed through on his threat to veto the NVRA if it was sent to him to sign. At the time he stated that "[n]o justification has been demonstrated for the extensive procedural requirements—and significant related costs—imposed on the states by this bill." (Palmer, 1992: 1983) On September 22, 1992 the Senate attempt to override President Bush's veto failed 62-38 and for the third straight year, the NVRA had been successfully defeated by the Republican party (Palmer, 1992: 2938).

One of the planks of Clinton's campaign agenda was to expand voter registration opportunities for American citizens. In fact, the 1992 Democratic Party platform included a provision which called for new laws to expand the electorate

such as election day registration. Clinton pledged to sign into law the same law Bush vetoed in 1992 (Solop and Wonders, 1995). Once elected, President Clinton signaled to Congress to send him a voter registration bill to sign into law. And indeed, one of the first bills considered by the 103rd House of Representatives was HR-2: National Voter Registration Act of 1993. (Solop and Wonders, 1995).

On January 27, 1993, the House Administration Committee approved the bill by a 9-3 over the objections and procedural attempts by Republicans to once again block the reform (Sammon, 1993: 216). As expected, on February 4 the House passed the bill 259-160 with the support of twenty-one Republicans (Sammon, 1993: 264). Following the passage of the bill by the House, Senate Democrats promised immediate action and on February 18, the Senate Rules Committee approved a draft of the bill on strictly party line vote, 7-5 (Sammon, 1993: 390). In response, Senate Republicans, led by Mitch McConnell (R-KY) vowed to kill the reform. McConnell said at the time, "[t]here will be a major effort to defeat this bill" (Sammon, 1993: 390).

Senate Republicans followed through on their threat and for the fourth straight year successfully stalled the bill when on March 5 a vote to shut off initial debate failed by a vote of 52-36 with Mark Hatfield (R-OR) the only Republican to join the Democrats in the cloture vote (Sammon, 1993: 513). Finally, on March 9 the Democrats succeeded in winning the support of five Republicans (Spector (PA);

Durenburger (MN); Packwood (Or); Jeffords (VT), and Hatfield (OR)) and a cloture vote was successful in ending the debate (Sammon, 1993: 591).

Final passage of the Senate version of the bill came on March 17 by a vote of 62-37. However, winning the support the necessary number of Republicans came at a price. The bill that was passed by the Senate encouraged but did not require states to offer registration opportunities at public assistance agencies (Sammon, 1993: 664). The removal of the public agency requirement was a major difference between the House and Senate versions of the bill and major obstacle that would have to be overcome in conference if the bill was to make its way to President Clinton to be signed.

The controversy in the Senate concerning the public assistance office registration revolved around Republican opponents' contention that requiring assistance office to offer registration might lead to the many clients of the these agencies feeling pressured to register to vote in order to receive their benefits. The removal of this provision from the Senate version of the bill created a divide between House and Senate conferees, which was not overcome until Dave Durenberger (R-MN) offered new language to the bill in which public agencies would be required to make it clear to clients that registering to vote is optional and that choosing to not register would not affect the amount of assistance they would receive. The conference also dropped the House provision in which states would be required to

offer registration opportunities at unemployment compensation offices (Sammon, 1993: 1080).

On May 11 the Senate passed the conference report on a 62-36 vote, which was preceded by one last successful cloture vote (63-37) (Sammon, 1993: 1221). On May 20, 1993 President Clinton followed through on his promise to sign registration reform legislation when he signed into law the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, a law almost identical to the one vetoed by President Bush one year earlier. After President Clinton signed the NVRA into law all states affected by the law were required to implement the provision of the NVRA by January 1, 1995. Those states which had to amend their constitutions to implement the law were given until January 1, 1995 (Solop and Wonders, 1995).

In his remarks upon signing the NVRA into law President Clinton stated

the victory we celebrate today is but the most recent chapter in the overlapping struggles of our nation's history, to enfranchise women and minorities, the disabled and the young, with the power to affect their own destiny and our common destiny by participating fully in our democracy. (Solop and Wonders, 1995: 79)

In this statement Clinton linked the NVRA with past attempts at extending the franchise, and highlighted the more than two-hundred year process of completely democratizing American electoral politics, through the inclusion of individuals from low participation groups such as the young, the poor, and racial minorities..

In his remarks the President also highlighted the notion of NVRA supporters that the key to increasing levels of electoral participation in the United States is

reduce the barriers to registration:

....the failure to register is the primary reason given by eligible citizens for their not voting. The principle behind this legislation is clear. Voting should be about discerning the will of the majority, not about testing the administrative capacity of a citizen. (Solop and Wonders, 1995: 79)

With these two statements then President Clinton spelled out the logic of most supporters of the reform. Individuals from low participation groups such as the poor and lower status, refrained from participating in elections, because the obstacle of registration placed between the individual and the voting was simply too burdensome to overcome and thus these individuals refrained from registering and therefore refrained from voting also.

Clearly, with the passage and implementation of the NVRA supporters of the reform, and President Clinton believed that they had achieved one of the key factors in bringing about the inclusion of low participation groups in the United States: the relaxation of restrictive registration barriers. The remainder of this project is devoted to the examination of the whether or not the relaxation of restrictive registration procedures through the NVRA resulted in the inclusion of individuals from low participation groups such as the poor, the young, and racial minorities, in the 1996 elections.

CHAPTER 3

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE NVRA ON STATE LEVEL TURNOUT

This chapter begins the analysis of the impact of the NVRA in the 1996 elections by exploring the effect that the relaxation of registration procedures through the implementation of the new law had on state level turnout. As mentioned, the logic of the reform is quite simple. The reduction in the costs of participation through the liberalization of registration laws was intended to facilitate increased turnout in American elections. The range of expectations about the ability of the reform to accomplish this feat was quite wide. The most optimistic supporters envisioned substantial increases in turnout (Piven and Cloward, 1983), while others the immediate effects would be muted (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Calvert, 1997). In the first section of this chapter, I will briefly examine the literature concerning the impact of the relaxation of registration laws on turnout. I will then describe the data, methods, and models to be used in examining NVRA on turnout in the 1996 elections.

Registration Laws and Electoral Participation

In a study comparing turnout in seventeen industrialized democracies, Powell (1986) found that while registration procedures could be isolated as a cause of the lower turnout in the United States compared to other democracies, they can only account for some of the difference. Using individual and aggregate level data from

the 1970s, Powell (1986) found that based on socioeconomic status (SES) and socio-political attitudes, Americans should be more likely to vote than individuals in other democracies. Americans tend to have higher levels of education, job prestige, and interest in political affairs, and their attitudes toward politics and the political system (efficacy, trust, party identification) tend to be much facilitative of participation than those of individuals in other democracies. Unfortunately, however, while Americans seem to be individually suited to participation (relative to Europeans), the “institutional context” of American politics, places a barrier between the citizen and the voting booth (Powell, 1986: 25). Thus, the placement of the responsibility of registration on the individual citizen rather than with the government (as in automatic registration), the weakness of the linkages between social groups and political parties, which can provide powerful psychological and actual mobilization effects, and the uneven competitiveness of American electoral districts all combine to produce an institutional environment which discourages electoral participation (Powell, 1986; Jackman, 1987). Powell notes that cultural factors such as group party linkages are difficult if not impossible to change, thus the most feasible way to increase turnout in the United States is to move the responsibility from the individual to the state through the implementation of automatic registration. In fact, Powell goes so far to estimate that if the United States adopted automatic registration or “something similar,” turnout should increase by as much as 14 percentage points. Unfortunately, this increase would still place American turnout levels some 10 points lower than the average democracy (Powell, 1986).

This estimate is somewhat larger than the one produced by Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) who estimated that if all states eliminated closing dates, had longer registration hours, opened registration offices on weekends, and permitted absentee voting, turnout in American elections would increase by 9.1% (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980: 73). Using Census Bureau and National Election Study (NES) data from 1972-1982, Mitchell and Wlezien (1995) found similar but weaker effects of registration laws on turnout than those estimated by Wolfinger and Rosenstone. They found that "fully liberalizing" registration laws (elimination of closing dates, elimination of purges, and extended election office hours) would result in increased turnout about 7.6 percent. Teixeira, reached a similar conclusion estimating a general relaxation of registration laws would increase turnout by about 7.8 percent (Teixeira, 1992). The reforms discussed by Wolfinger and Rosenstone, Mitchell and Wlezien, and Teixeira, are not on the order of automatic registration of citizens by the state, but they would nonetheless substantially reduce the barriers placed between the citizen and the voting both by most state registration systems prior to the NVRA. Taken as a whole, then, this stream of research suggests that one of the keys to increasing turnout in the United States is to create legal environment which facilitates participation by reducing the burdens of, or even eliminating registration procedures.

There is also reason, however, to be cautious about the magnitude of the impact that the relaxation of registration laws could have on turnout. Franklin (1996) casts doubt on whether or not registration systems have any substantial impact

on voting at all. In an analysis of electoral participation in twenty-nine countries, he found no effect whatsoever for voluntary registration (in contrast to automatic registration) on the overall level of turnout. From this analysis, then, the lower turnout in American elections is attributable to more fundamental aspects of the United States political system, such as noncompulsory voting, weekday voting, the fact that elections are less salient due to the fragmentation of power, the lack of clear social-group/party linkages and the wide range of opportunities for other forms of participation.

Since the mid-1970s, many states have experimented with various registration reforms ranging from moving the closing date closer to the day of election, allowing citizens to register on election day, and providing residents the opportunity to register through the mail and at public agencies such as motor vehicle and welfare offices (Knack, 1995; Rhine, 1995; Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). Prior to the NVRA, twenty-eight states¹ had some type of mail-in registration program (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). As with most other state laws, there was a great deal of variation between states in the restrictiveness of the programs. Some states required registration forms received through the mail to be notarized, while others required no form of verification (Knack, 1995; Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). Knack (1995) found that mail in registration did positively affect registration and turnout in those

¹ Knack (1995) classifies thirty-one states as having mail-in programs. He classifies Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, and South Dakota as having mail-in programs, while Highton and Wolfinger do not. Highton and Wolfinger classify New Jersey as having a mail-in, while Knack omits it.

states that required no form of verification, but the requirement that mailed in forms be notarized tended to depress registration and turnout (Knack, 1995: 805).

Allowing citizens to register to vote on the day of the election is strongly related to increased levels of turnout (Fenster, 1994; Highton, 1997; Brians 1997). By eliminating the costs involved with registering prior to the election, same day registration essentially makes voting a one-step process (Fenster, 1994; Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). The potential voter no longer has to take the time overcome the obstacles of registration. One can simply register when one votes. Fenster (1994) found that the three states (Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) which had same day registration prior to the NVRA experienced a 3.04% increase in turnout between 1976 and 1992, while all other states experienced a 1.69% decrease over the same period. He concluded that if all states adopted election day registration turnout nationwide would increase by 5% (Fenster, 1994: 80). Brians (1997) and Highton (1997) also found strong positive effects of election day registration on turnout, with estimates indicating that states with election day registration had turnout levels nine and ten percentage points higher than states without election day registration, respectively. Election day registration is very similar to the automatic registration found in other democracies, and obviously has a positive impact on overall turnout. However, as of 1998, only six states had allowed citizens to register on the day of the election.²

² New Hampshire, Idaho, and Wyoming took advantage of the option provided by the NVRA to adopt election day registration instead of NVRA procedures.

In 1975, Michigan led all states when it implemented the first motor voter program, allowing Michigan residents to register when they applied for driver's licenses and vehicle registration. As of 1995 twenty-four states had some form of "motor voter" registration ranging from minimum implementation to very aggressive implementation (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995).³ The results of initial tests suggest that in those states which had some form of motor voter registration, turnout was higher than in those states with no motor voter program (Knack, 1995; Rhine, 1992; 1995). Teixeira (1992) estimates the impact of a national motor voter law would result in a turnout increase of 4.2%. There is reason to believe, then, that the implementation of the NVRA would increase the overall turnout level in American elections.

Initial analyses of the 1996 elections suggest that doubts concerning the effectiveness of the NVRA in increasing turnout were warranted. Using aggregate state-level data, Martinez and Hill (1997) found that those states which changed their laws the most to comply with the NVRA (those with no program prior to 1992) had turnout rates about one-tenth of a percentage point of higher than states which experienced the smallest changes in their registration programs. States which moved from a moderate level of implementation prior to 1992 to compliance in 1996 had turnout rates about three-tenths of a percentage point lower than high implementation states. The authors conclude that if all states made only minimal changes in the

³ Rhine (1995) and Knack (1995) both classified twenty-eight states as having motor voter programs prior to the NVRA.

registration laws, turnout would have been 49.35 % which is about two-tenths of a percentage points above the actual observed turnout.

Groarke (1997) found that a state's willingness to implement federal procedures had an impact on turnout in 1996. In those states in which state officials implemented federal procedures quickly, the mean turnout decline in 1996 (all states declined from 1992) was 1.5 percentage points lower than in those states in which officials presented a legal challenge to the federal law. Groarke's study alerts us to the problems that obstruction on the part of state officials can have on the outcomes of policy implementation. The possibility, therefore, exists that turnout in 1996 may have been depressed in those states in which elections officials (as well as legislatures) balked at implementing the NVRA.

The range of expectations concerning the impact of the NVRA was quite wide. Although optimistic proponents of registration reform foresaw turnout levels approaching those in other democracies, the evidence of registration reform and turnout suggests, however, that reforms such as the NVRA are only part of the answer to addressing the traditionally low turnout in American elections. Turnout is not only a function of the legal structure of a political system. Voting takes places within an election and elections take place within a political context. It is likely that a reform such as the NVRA, which places millions of citizens into the pool of potential voters, will have a greater impact in a political context conducive to increased turnout, such as a competitive election.

Presidential campaigns create an information rich environment in which the increased visibility and intensity of the campaign increases public interest and activity on the part of the two parties (Jackson, 1997). While the presidential election of 1996 may have been uncompetitive, thereby driving down interest on a national level, there were certainly states in which the contest was very close. In these states we would expect the level of intensity and information to be relatively high, and we would also expect the two major parties and their candidates to increase their mobilization efforts in an attempt to gain the votes of potential supporters. Embedded within the low turnout national election of 1996, then, may have been many "state-level" presidential contests in which the competitiveness of the campaign created an environment conducive to higher levels of turnout.

While the presidential campaign has the greatest mobilization potential within the hierarchy of elections in the American system, state level races can also facilitate turnout. Cox and Munger (1989) found that in off-year House races in which the outcome was uncertain, the parties and candidates increased their level of spending and mobilization efforts. As a result, turnout increased in these races. Additionally, the presence of at least one concurrent statewide election such as a Senate race and/or a gubernatorial race, and the concomitant increase in spending, adds to the impact of closeness and candidate spending in House races (Caldeira, Patterson, and Marrko, 1985; Cox and Munger, 1989; Jackson, 1993). Thus, House races which are competitive and take place in the presence of statewide races are likely to have higher

turnout due to increased visibility produced by a competitive statewide race, and the increased activity of the candidates.

The impact of state level races on turnout can also be influenced by the presidential race. Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko (1985) argue lower level elections receive "free advertising, information, and stimulation from contests higher in the hierarchy of political salience." (Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko, 1985: 501) From this perspective then, the high level of information and intensity of presidential elections spills over into state level races increasing their intensity and mobilization potential (Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko, 1985).⁴

Thus, we might expect that state-level turnout would be higher in those contexts in which the election season produces competitive national and state level races with increased information and activity by the two parties and their candidates. Thus, while 1996 may have produced a low-visibility and low-turnout presidential election, there may have been specific states in which the combination of the presidential and state level races combined to produce an environment conducive to increased turnout.

Obviously, the impact of mobilization is greatest upon those most immediately able to participate in elections—individuals who are registered to vote (Jackson, 1996). In the pre-NVRA period, the placement of the responsibility of

⁴ Jackson (1997) argues that impact of Senate and Gubernatorial elections on turnout is negligible in the presence of the presidential campaign. In a sense, the visibility and intensity of the presidential election drowns out any mobilization potential of the state-level races.

registration on the individual created a system in which those with higher levels characteristics conducive to participation (education, income, political efficacy, and interest in politics) were much more likely to register than individuals without these facilitative characteristics (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Jackson, 1996; Timpone, 1998). Once registered, these individuals were more likely to participate in elections, in part because of their higher levels of the skills and resources conducive to political participation. However, by virtue of their registered status, these individuals were much more likely to be induced into the voting by politicized environment of the election season, and they were also available for mobilization by the two major parties within the context of competitive elections (Jackson, 1996). Thus, registration status and mobilization are strongly related. Registered individuals are much more easily mobilized into participation.

As mentioned, the logic of the NVRA is quite simple. By placing registration opportunities in front a greater number of citizens, the reform should increase the overall number of registered citizens. While many of the new registrants produced by the NVRA may vote simply because of their new status as registered citizens, the impact of the law is likely to be much stronger in competitive elections in which increased visibility and intensity of the campaign creates greater public interest and the parties and their candidates expend resources to gain voters' support.

Variation in State Registration Procedures

Prior to the implementation of the NVRA, there was great variation in the restrictiveness of state registration laws. In 1992, twenty-four states had some form of motor voter program, but there were variations among these programs. Eleven

states had active programs in which office staff asked clients whether they wanted to register to vote. The other thirteen states had “passive” programs in which clients were not prompted to register by office staff, but registration applications were made available to visitors somewhere in the office space. Three states (Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) had election day registration, North Dakota had no registration system, and the remaining twenty-four states had no motor voter program whatsoever (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Knack, 1995; Rhine, 1995; Martinez and Hill, 1997).

There were also variations in other state registration laws. In 1992, twenty-eight states had some type of mail in registration program in which citizens were allowed to register through the mail (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Knack, 1995). Eleven of these states required registration applications to be either notarized, or witnessed, or both, and the remaining seventeen states did not require any sort of verification (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Knack, 1995). Finally, in 1992, nine⁵ states had agency-based registration programs in which individuals were allowed to register at state agencies, such as welfare offices (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Knack, 1995). Knack notes that only one of these states (Minnesota) had an agency program in which office staff prompted clients as to whether or not they wanted to register. The remaining eight states with agency programs simply made registration applications available in the office (Knack, 1995).⁶ Obviously, there was overlap in

⁵ Knack classifies 10 states as having agency programs. He classifies Arizona, Rhode Island, and Texas as having agency programs, while Highton and Wolfinger do not, and Highton and Wolfinger classify Pennsylvania and New Jersey as having agency programs, while Knack does not.

⁶ States also varied in the length and timing of registration office hours. According to Highton and Wolfinger 23 states opened their election office during evening hours

the varying procedures states used, with many states having some or all of the three reforms (motor voter, mail-in, agency) and some states having none.⁷

Thus, state registration laws and procedures were anything but consistent. Indeed, there was great variation in the degree to which states facilitated access to registration. NVRA opponents sought to eliminate this wide range of registration procedures across states by attempting to create a system of registration laws which would be very similar across all states.⁸ The NVRA required all states which did not have election day registration (excluding North Dakota) to implement active motor voter programs in which the office staff in motor vehicle bureaus asked visitors whether or not they would like to register to vote. The thirty-four states which did not have active programs had to make changes to their to their registration systems in order to establish active motor voter programs. The twenty-two states which had no motor voter program prior to the NVRA had to make the greatest changes to comply with the new law.⁹

and/or on weekends, while 15 states did not regularly operate election offices for 40 hours per week. Finally, nine states did not purge registrants from the rolls for non-participation, while the other 42 states and the District of Columbia removed voters from the registration rolls for nonvoting.

⁷ See Appendix B for a full breakdown of state registration procedures.

⁸ Obviously, six states (Wisconsin, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Idaho, Wyoming, and North Dakota) are excluded from this "standardized" system of registration by virtue of their use election day registration. While Maine does have election day registration it is not exempt from the NVRA because some parts of the state the citizens is required to register at a central location (Knack, 1998).

⁹ The numbers used in this discussion reflect the omission of those states with election day registration and North Dakota.

The NVRA also mandated affected states must offer the opportunity for citizens to register through the mail with no form verification. Thus, the thirty-four affected states which did not have "easy" mail-in programs were required to establish mail-in registration programs in which citizen were allowed to mail in registration applications without notarization and/or a witness. Once again those states with no mail-in program whatsoever had to make the greatest changes to their registration systems to establish the NVRA mail-in program.

Finally, the NVRA required affected states to offer clients of state agencies (WIC, AFDC) the opportunity to register to vote. As with the NVRA's motor voter requirements, office staff at these agencies were required to ask visitors to the office whether or not they wanted to register. Because only one state (Minnesota) had an active agency program in which staff asked clients if they wanted to register, forty-four states (non election day states) had to make major changes to their laws, with the states which had no program whatsoever required to make the greatest changes to their laws.

The NVRA makes strides toward standardization of state registration laws by requiring those states which did not have fully liberalized registration systems to change their procedures to meet the standards of the most facilitative states prior to the implementation of the NVRA. The law did not, however, create a uniform system of registration across states. There is still substantial variation in the closing dates among states. Only those six states with election day registration and North Dakota do not place a time barrier between the citizen and the voting booth by

closing the registration rolls a specified amount of time prior to the election. Furthermore, states were also allowed to continue to set their own hours of operation for elections offices and public agencies (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). Both closing dates and hours of operation are believed to influence levels of registration and turnout (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Squire et al. 1987; Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Mitchell and Wlezien, 1995), and the omission of these factors from the NVRA certainly leaves in place factors which could act as barriers to potential voters in those states with restrictive office hours and long closing dates. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to determining whether or not the implementation of NVRA procedures in those affected states which had to make changes to their laws had any impact on the overall level of turnout in these states.

Data and Methods

The analysis in this chapter is based on the assumption that we would expect to see a greater effect in those states whose programs were most effected by the federal law. As discussed in the previous section there was great variation in state registration procedures prior to the implementation of the NVRA. Some states had registration systems which were very similar to the one mandated by the NVRA, while other states had very restrictive systems with no motor voter, mail-in, or agency programs whatsoever. The potential for a change in turnout in the latter is far greater because these states had to make the greatest changes to their laws to come into compliance with the NVRA. States which previously had systems very similar to the

NVRA had to make very few changes to come into compliance, and therefore we would expect lesser of a change in turnout in those states.

For example, Florida had a very restrictive registration system prior to the NVRA. It had no motor voter program, no opportunity for citizens to register through the mail, and did not allow registration at state agencies such as AFDC offices or other state offices. In order to comply with the federal law, state officials had to implement an active motor voter program (in which motor vehicle office staff asked clients if they wanted to register), a mail registration system in which citizens were only required to return the application (without a witness or notarization), and an agency-based program in which the staff at public agencies were required to ask clients if they wanted to register.¹⁰ By implementing these procedures and coming into compliance with the NVRA, Florida moved from a very restrictive state in which registration required the individual to travel to elections office thirty days prior to the election in order to gain access to the voting booth, to one in which registration was made relatively easy. The potential for a positive impact of registration reform on turnout should be quite high in a state like Florida.

Contrast the scenario in Florida (and similar states) with Minnesota. Minnesota has long been considered one of the most inclusive states in terms of access to the voting booth. It has had election day registration since 1973, a mail-in

¹⁰ The law also prohibited states from purging registrants for non-participation and required to states to allow changes of address and party identification at the same locations.

program since 1976, an active motor voter program since 1988, and agency-based registration since 1988 (Knack, 1995).¹¹ In order to come into compliance with NVRA procedures Minnesota had to make almost no changes to its registration system. The potential for increases in registration and turnout in Minnesota, therefore, is far lower than in a state like Florida, because overall registration and turnout should already have been relatively high due to the facilitative nature of the registration system. Thus, based on the above discussion, we would expect *the greatest effects on turnout should be seen in states which made the greatest changes to their registration procedures to come into compliance with the NVRA.*

Obviously, the cases of Florida and Minnesota represent the extremes in the variation in state registration systems. In fact, when one examines the degree of implementation of NVRA procedures (motor voter, mail-in, agency) prior to the implementation of the federal law, there are many possible combinations of the reforms states had prior to the NVRA. I use a trichotomous categorization of state implementation in 1992 to capture the varying degree of impact related to the different levels of implementation. States were classified based on the degree to which their registration systems prior to the NVRA facilitated registration and turnout. I assume those states with the most restrictive registration systems prior to implementation have the greatest potential for increased turnout, and those states with the most facilitative systems have the smallest potential for turnout change.

¹¹ Ohio is the only other state to have an active motor voter program, mail-in program, and an agency program prior to the NVRA (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995).

Each state was classified based on whether or not it had an active, passive, or no motor voter program in 1992; whether or not it had a mail-in program in 1992, and whether or not it had a state agency program (AFDC, WIC). These three criteria produced twelve possible combinations of prior implementation and using these combinations states were classified as having restrictive, moderate, or facilitative registration systems prior to the implementation of the NVRA¹². Eleven states (and the District of Columbia) had “facilitative” registration systems prior to the NVRA including the four states which had same day (or no) registration (Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Dakota¹³). This group of states had to make minimal changes to the registration system to come into compliance with the NVRA. Another fourteen¹⁴ states had to make substantial changes to their registration systems but nonetheless had enough reforms in place prior to the NVRA to be classified here as “moderate” systems prior to the federal law. Finally, twenty-two¹⁵ states had to make major changes to comply with the mandate and are classified as “restrictive” systems

¹² See Appendices A and B for a detailed discussion of the classification of state registration systems.

¹³ These four states were given exemptions from implementation NVRA procedures.

¹⁴ Prior to the NVRA Vermont had a passive motor voter program, a mail-in program, and no agency program, and was therefore classified as moderate. However, there is still substantial doubt as to whether or not officials in Vermont actually implemented NVRA procedures. Because of the ambiguity regarding implementation in Vermont, it is excluded from all models in the analysis.

¹⁵ Idaho, New Hampshire, and Wyoming were all three classified as having restrictive systems prior to the NVRA. However, as noted, these states chose to adopt election day registration rather than implement NVRA procedures, and thus the models include a dummy variable to capture these states and they are excluded from the classification as restrictive.

prior to the NVRA. This group of states includes those states which had no type of convenient registration prior to the NVRA.

As discussed earlier, however, turnout is not only a function of the legal structure of a political system, voting takes place within an election and elections take place within a political context. Because we would expect turnout to be higher in competitive elections, in which the parties must expend effort and resources to stimulate public interest, *the impact of the NVRA should be accentuated in those states which experienced increases competitiveness of the presidential election, had a Senate race in 1996 when it did not in 1992, and had increases in the level of campaign spending.*

In order to test the above hypotheses I will estimate the following model

$$\text{Turnout}_{96} = a + b_1 \text{Turnout}_{92} + b_2 \text{Restrictive State}_{92} + b_3 \text{Moderate State}_{92} + b_4 \text{New Election Day Registration} + b_5 \text{Delayed Implementation} + b_6 \text{Presidential Margin}_{92-96} + b_7 \text{Senate Race} + b_8 \text{Campaign Spending}_{96-92} + e.$$

Where,

Dependent Variable: (1996 Turnout) Turnout is measured as votes cast divided by the voting age population. The data from for this measure were taken from the Federal Elections Commission (<http://www.fec.gov/pages/96to.htm>).

1992 Turnout: Because we are trying to assess the impact of the NVRA on turnout in the 1996 elections, turnout in 1992 is included as a control variable to capture the impact of all those factors influencing turnout in 1992 on turnout in 1996 (such as political culture, the distribution of resources, and registration laws). The coefficient

measures the stability in turnout between 1992 and 1996. For example, a slope coefficient for the 1992 variable of one indicates perfect stability in turnout between 1992 and 1996, which tells us those factors influencing turnout in 1992 are also playing a very large role in the construction of turnout in 1996. On the other hand, if the slope coefficient for 1992 is zero then there is a great deal of instability between the two elections and the factors influencing turnout in 1992 are not influencing turnout in 1996. (<http://www.fec.gov/votregis/turn/turn.htm>).

Prior Level of Reform: Two variables are included to measure the varying levels of registration reform in different states.¹⁶ The first is “restrictive”, coded one if the state had few or no NVRA procedures in place prior to the implementation of the NVRA and zero if it had a “moderate” or “facilitative” registration system. The second variable, is for those states with “moderate” levels of reform prior to passage of the national law and is coded one if the state had some NVRA procedures in place prior to implementation of the federal law but still had to make substantial changes to comply and zero if the state had a restrictive or facilitative system prior to the NVRA. Those states with election day registration (Wyoming, Wisconsin, Minnesota) and North Dakota, which has no registration system, are classified as having high levels of implementation prior to the NVRA.

New Election Day States: One of the unexpected results of the NVRA was the adoption of election day registration in these states. New Hampshire, Idaho, and

¹⁶ See Appendix B.

Wyoming received waivers allowing them to adopt election day registration instead of implementing NVRA procedures (Human Serve, 1996; Groarke, 1997; Knack and White, 1998). Knack (1998) found that turnout decline in these states was substantially lower than states which adopted NVRA procedures and thus it is crucial to include a variable for these states in a model measuring the effect of the NVRA on turnout in 1996. I have included a dummy variable coded one for New Hampshire, Idaho, and Wyoming and zero for the other 46 states and the District of Columbia. This variable should capture the impact of implementing of election day registration in these three states on turnout in 1996.

Delayed Implementation: Not all states were willing or able to completely implement NVRA procedures by the January 1, 1995 deadline set by Congress (Human Serve, 1996; Groarke, 1997). Therefore, we must consider the possibility that obstruction on the part of state officials, or delays due to logistics may have depressed the impact of the NVRA on turnout in some states. A dummy variable coded one if the state is classified as having delayed implementation (16 states)¹⁷ and zero for the other 35 states classified as either completing implementation on time or being exempt due to election day registration. (See Human Serve, 1992 and Groarke, 1997 information regarding states that delayed implementation).

¹⁷ The following states are classified as delaying implementation: Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Kansas, Virginia, South Carolina, Mississippi, Arkansas, Montana, California.

Presidential Margin Change: We would expect the heightened public interest and mobilization efforts of the parties and candidates in a presidential contest to increase turnout levels (Cox and Munger, 1989). Because this analysis is attempting capture the change in turnout, a variable measuring the change in the margin of victory of the presidential election between 1992 and 1996 is included. For simplicity of interpretation, the variable is measured as the actual margin of the presidential election in 1996 subtracted from the actual margin in 1992. The variable is coded in this manner so larger numbers reflect mobilizing conditions rather than demobilization. For instance, if the margin of victory in 1992 in a particular state was two percentage points and the margin in 1996 for that state was one point, then the change in the margin of victory would be one. The larger the difference, therefore, the more competitive the presidential election in that state. A negative number on this would mean the margin in 1996 was greater than in 1992 and thus the state experienced a decrease in the competitiveness of the presidential election.

Senatorial Race: Senatorial races should create more interest in a campaign, particularly if they are competitive (Cox and Munger, 1989). Because we are trying to capture the change in turnout between 1992 and 1996, this variable is coded to reflect the change in the presence of senatorial races between 1992 and 1996. The seventeen states which had a U.S. Senate election in November 1996 but not in November 1992 were coded +1. The seventeen states with Senate elections in 1992

but not 1996 were coded -1, and the remaining states were coded zero.¹⁸

Campaign Spending: As campaign spending within a state increases we expect to see increases in the overall level of turnout (Caldeira, Patterson, and Marrko, 1985; Cox and Munger, 1989). Using this same logic, if a state undergoes substantial changes in its level of spending from one election to the next, we would expect to see a concomitant increase in turnout. The model therefore includes a variable measuring the change in Senate and House spending between 1992 and 1996. The variable is measured as the difference between the log of the actual level of spending United States Senate and House races in 1992 and the log of the actual level in spending in 1996.¹⁹

The model described above will capture the additive nature of the factors influencing aggregate turnout in 1996. In other words, using the additive model we can gauge the independent effects of changing registration procedures to comply with the NVRA while controlling for the mobilization effects of the campaign. The

¹⁸ Obviously gubernatorial elections and state legislative elections can contribute to differences in state level turnout. However, no state changed the gubernatorial or state legislative election calendar between 1992 and 1996, while on the other hand many state had U.S. Senate elections in 1996 that did not in 1992 and vice versa, thus this variable, along with the change in the presidential margin, and campaign spending was used to capture the change in mobilization between 1992 and 1996. The 1996 data for this variable were collected from the *New York Times* web page election results. The data for 1992 were collected from the *1992 Elections Data book*.

¹⁹ The relationship between spending is not linear. The impact of change in spending on turnout as the level moves from \$0 to \$100,000 is far greater than if a the spending level in state increased from \$1,000,000 to \$1,100,000. Therefore, spending variables must be transformed by taking the log of the actual number of dollars. Because the log of a negative number has no definition, the spending measure used in the model is the log of dollars in 1992 subtracted from the log of dollars in 1996.

argument here, however, is that in order to truly capture any effects of the NVRA on turnout, we need to examine the joint effects of electoral mobilizing conditions (closeness of the presidential election, the presence of a Senate race, and campaign spending) within the differing contexts of changes in states' registration systems. For instance, we might ask what is the effect of campaign spending in a state which made major changes to its procedures compared to the impact of campaign spending in a state which minimal changes to comply. Thus, an interactive model will be estimated in which six multiplicative terms are added to the additive model. Each term will measure the impact of the mobilizing conditions described above (closeness of the presidential election, presence of a senate race, and campaign spending) within each of the three state contexts of registration change (low, moderate, and high).

Results

We begin with a simple comparison of the turnout rates²⁰ in states by the level of implementation of state registration programs prior to the passage of the NVRA. The 1992 data presented in Figure 3-1 confirm previous research (Rhine, 1992; Rhine 1995; Knack, 1995) that states with high levels of NVRA type procedures tend to have higher levels of turnout than states without such programs. The District of Columbia and the ten states with the most conducive registration systems had an average turnout (weighted by the voting age population) of 61.1% in 1992.²¹ The

²⁰ The means reported in Figure 1 are weighted by the 1992 voting age population of each state.

²¹ The weighted average turnout in 1992 in the 10 states in the highest implementation group excluding Minnesota, Maine, Wisconsin (states with same day registration) and

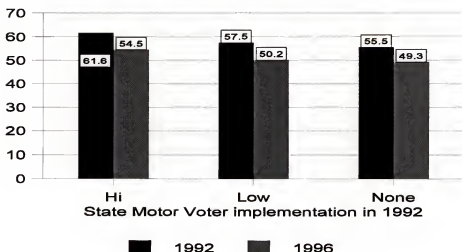


Figure 3-1. Turnout of Voting Age Population in 1992 and 1996

fourteen states with moderate implementation of NVRA procedures had a lower average turnout rate of 54.7%, and the remaining twenty-two states which had restrictive registration systems in 1992 had an average turnout of 53.1%. State registration laws, based on these numbers, appear to be related to positively related to turnout.

Figure 3-1 also shows that turnout in 1996 was highest in the states with facilitative systems in 1992, reflecting the lagged effect of registration systems and other factors which contribute to higher turnout in those states. But the gap between these states and the others had narrowed. Turnout declined between 1992 and 1996 in each category, but Figure 3-1 suggests that the decline may have been abated slightly by implementation NVRA procedures. On average, states that had high

North Dakota (with no registration) was 58.7%.

levels of implementation in 1992 (and were thus least affected by the federal mandate) had a decline of 7.1% in turnout, while those that changed their registration laws the most to comply with the federal mandate had a decline of only 6.2%.²² These differences are small but they do nonetheless suggest that the decline in turnout may have been lessened somewhat by the implementation of NVRA procedures.

Turnout is not solely a function of registration laws. We must therefore examine the impact of the reform on turnout in the presence of other factors which could also play a role in significantly influencing a state's level of turnout. Table 3-1 displays the results from a multivariate examination of turnout in 1996. Model A in Table 3-1 is the simple additive model and it attempts to gauge the independent effects of NVRA implementation controlling for turnout in 1992, the delay in implementation of NVRA on the part of some states, the adoption of election day registration by Idaho, New Hampshire, and Wyoming, and the mobilization effects due to the closeness of the presidential election, the presence of a Senate race, and campaign spending. The coefficient for the lag term (turnout in 1992) is quite large and significant, suggesting that those factors which influenced turnout in 1992 continued to influence variations in turnout in 1996. *Controlling for other factors in the model, the coefficients for prior implementation suggest that the implementation*

²² Interestingly, the three states (New Hampshire, Idaho, Wyoming) which adopted election day registration rather than NVRA procedures experienced the smallest decline in turnout from 1992 (-5.6 points). One must note, however, that the average turnout in 1992 for these three states was 63.5% which almost two points higher than the average for states with facilitative states.

Table 3-1
Regression Estimates of Turnout in 1996

	Model A	Model B
Turnout 1992	.788** (.053)	.767** (.053)
Low Implementation 92	-.003 (.010)	-.011 (.013)
Moderate 92	-.014 (.010)	-.014 (.013)
Delayed Implementation	.0007 (.007)	.004 (.006)
New Election Day States	.007 (.020)	-.003 (.019)
Margin 92-96	-.002 (.001)	-.004** (.001)
Senate Race	.001 (.004)	.02** (.002)
Campaign Expenditures	.002 (.002)	-.0005 (.002)
Margin*Low		.002 (.002)
Margin*Moderate		.002 (.002)
SenRac*Low		-.04** (.017)
SenRac*Moderate		-.04** (.013)
Spend*Low		.02 (.014)
Spend*Moderate		.03 (.017)
Constant	.063*	.068*
R ²	.898	.929
R ² Change		.031**
Adjusted R ²	.894	.900
N=50		
*= $p < .10$ **= $p < .05$		
Weighted Least Squares (Weighted by the Square of the voting age population)		
Standard Errors are in the parentheses		

of NVRA procedures had little to no effect on state level turnout. Both of the variables have negative signs, suggesting that those states which made changes to their laws had turnout rates lower than states which made very minimal or no changes to their laws. On average, states which made the greatest changes to their laws had turnout levels about three-tenths of a percentage point lower than in states which had relatively liberalized systems prior the NVRA. States which made moderate changes to the procedures experienced turnout levels about one percentage point lower than already liberalized states. The coefficient for the three states choosing to adopt election day registration rather than NVRA procedures, while not statistically discernable from zero does suggest turnout in these three states (Idaho, New Hampshire, and Wyoming) was slightly higher (seven-tenths of a percentage point) than in the other forty-seven states in the analysis.

The mobilization variables in Model A also suggest very modest effects on turnout in 1996. Interestingly, the coefficient for the change in the margin of victory in the presidential election is negative. On its face, the coefficient suggests that as the competitiveness of the presidential contest in a given state increased, turnout decreased in that state. However, the coefficient is quite small (and nonsignificant), indicating that for every one point decrease in the margin of victory of the presidential election there was a one-tenth of a percentage point decrease in turnout. In contrast, the coefficients for the presence of a Senate Race and the change in campaign spending, while also not significant, do suggest slight positive effects on turnout. On the whole, the additive model suggests that in the short-term the

implementation of NVRA procedures had very slight effects on turnout in 1996. Additionally, the potential mobilization effects of the campaign season also appeared to have very little impact on state level turnout.

The additive model assumes that the effects of registration law changes are constant for all levels of mobilization. It is possible, however, that the effects of registration reform are greater for states with greater levels of mobilizing conditions. Simply put, we are interested in the effect of mobilizing conditions in states which made moderate or major changes to their laws to comply with the new law compared to those states which made minimal changes. An interactive model including multiplicative terms to capture the effects of mobilizing conditions in the various state contexts allows us to determine whether or not the implementation of NVRA procedures in the presence of mobilizing conditions had an impact on turnout. And, indeed, Model B in Table 3-1 suggests that the combination of implementation and mobilization (spending) appears to have resulted in a *slight positive* impact on turnout.

Looking at Model B in Table 3-1, one can see that the coefficient for turnout in 1992 remains very large and significant at well below conventional levels. Controlling for the joint effects of implementation and mobilization, the two coefficients capturing change in registration laws suggest turnout in states which made moderate or major changes to their laws, and had no change in the competitiveness of the presidential election, no change to the Senate electoral calendar, and no changes in the level of campaign spending, on average, experienced

turnout levels about one-percentage point below states which made minimal changes to their laws.

The addition of the interactive terms allows us to now examine the impact of mobilizing conditions with each of the three implementation contexts. Thus, each of the three variables for mobilization represent the impact of these mobilization conditions in high implementation states. For instance, the coefficient for change in the margin of victory in the presidential election is negative and significant. However, this variable in the interactive model now represents the impact of the change in the competitiveness of the presidential contest in states which made minimal changes to their laws, and on the whole, the impact is still very small. Turnout decreased by four-tenths of a percentage point with every one point increase in the competitiveness of the presidential election. The coefficient for the change in the Senate electoral calendar is also significant and suggests that those states with facilitative registration systems which had a Senate race in 1996 but not in 1992 experienced turnout levels two points higher than high implementation which did not experience a change in the Senate calendar. Changes in the level of spending did not appear to have much of an impact in these states. But what about the effects of mobilization in states which made moderate or major changes to their laws?

Interestingly, the presence of a Senate race in 1996 but not in 1992 resulted in turnout levels significantly lower than facilitative states with the same condition. In states that made the greatest changes to their laws the presence of a Senate race produced turnout levels two-percentage points lower than states which made minimal

changes to their laws. States which made moderate changes to their laws experienced turnout levels also about two-points lower than facilitative states. Both of these coefficients are significant, but may simply suggest that the presence of a Senate race had no impact in states which made changes to their registration systems and the lower levels of turnout reflect the already higher turnout levels in facilitative states due to the liberalized nature of their registration systems.

Campaign spending in these states appeared to have modest *positive* effects on the level turnout. Every one unit increase in the change of logs between 1992 and 1996 in states which made the greatest changes resulted in turnout rates two percentage points higher²³ than in states which made minimal changes, and the same increase in states which made moderate changes to their laws resulted in turnout levels three percentage points higher than in facilitative states. Although, these variables are not significant at conventional levels, the standard errors do suggest that the both coefficients do approach significance. Therefore, while it appears that spending did not have an impact on turnout in states with facilitative registration systems, higher levels of campaign spending in those states which underwent changes to their registration system resulted in slightly higher levels of turnout. On the whole, then, the impact of mobilizing conditions in states which made changes to their laws appears to have had mixed results. States with at least one Senate race in 1996 but not in 1992 and made changes to their laws experienced significantly lower levels of

²³ This number is derived by adding the coefficients for the change in the log of spending variables and the interaction term for the spending and no implementation variable (Hardy, 1993).

turnout than states which underwent minimal changes to their systems and had the same change in their Senate electoral calendar. Changes in the level of spending, on the other hand, produced small but positive effects on turnout in those states which made changes to their registration systems.

Discussion

The results in Table 3-1 tell us that the implementation of NVRA procedures on their own had little (if any) effect on state level turnout in 1996. The results of the additive model suggest states which made moderate or major changes to their laws to comply experienced levels of turnout significantly higher than states with already facilitative systems. However, when we consider the impact of implementation in the presence of increased levels of campaign spending, then we see that there was a slight positive effect on turnout relative to facilitative states. The interaction between spending and implementation suggests that the impact of campaign spending was greater in those states which underwent changes to their laws to comply with the NVRA and thus had large numbers of potential voters to be mobilized. Simply put, in those states in which the parties and candidates expended resources, many of the new registrants produced by the NVRA appeared to have responded by going into the voting booth.

However, as noted in the previous section, one of the implicit (if not explicit) goals of NVRA supporters was to increase turnout rates of traditionally low participation groups such as the young, the poor, and racial minorities in order to reduce the gap in participation between these groups and those who tend to dominate

electoral politics such as older, middle class, whites. It is important therefore that we determine whether or not the NVRA did anything to alleviate the inequality in electoral participation between these sectors of the electorate. The next chapter will directly address the question of whether not the implementation of NVRA procedures reduced the class, age, and racial biases the active electorate.

CHAPTER 4

THE NVRA AND PARTICIPATION INEQUALITY

The results of the previous chapter suggest that the implementation of NVRA procedures had little to no effect upon state-level turnout. The ultimate long range test of registration reform, however, should be the degree to which reforms such as the NVRA overcome the tendency for certain groups in the United States to be overrepresented in the active electorate. Not only is voter turnout in American elections lower than in other democracies (Powell, 1986; Jackman, 1987), the overrepresentation of the upper classes (and underrepresentation of the lower classes) is more pronounced in the United States than in other democracies. Simply put, those individuals from the middle and upper classes comprise a greater share of the actual voting population than they do of the voting age population. Additionally, individuals of low socioeconomic status comprise a much smaller share of the actual voting population given their share of the voting age population. The combination of the overrepresentation of the middle and upper classes, and the underrepresentation of the lower classes results in a bias of the active electorate toward the middle classes (Burnham, 1987; Leighley and Nagler, 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993).

Powell (1986) places the blame for the inequality in participation between socioeconomic groups on the institutional context of the United States. Because of

its system of restrictive registration laws, the American electoral system places the responsibility for registration upon the individual citizen rather than the government (as in automatic registration) and increases the effect of individual level characteristics such as education on registration and turnout. The more education an individual has the more likely that individual is to be willing and able to overcome these barriers, and American electoral politics is, therefore, characterized by an active voting public skewed toward those of higher socioeconomic status.

Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) on the other hand, focus attention on the mobilization efforts of the parties and candidates for the skew in participation in the United States. They argue that because the parties and candidate tend to focus their mobilization efforts on those individuals who are easiest to find, such as members of voluntary associations and those individuals who are most likely to respond (those of higher educational status and those with higher levels of income). Unfortunately, this type of targeted mobilization tends to accentuate the inequality in participation between those of upper and lower status (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 240-241).

The inequality in participation between the socioeconomic groups is not the only participation bias in American electoral politics. Young people are underrepresented in the active electorate, while older Americans tend to be overrepresented (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Powell, 1986). Additionally, racial minorities are also underrepresented in the active electorate compared to whites (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). Taken together then, these three groups (the poor, the young, and racial minorities) can be considered target groups of the NVRA in that

the reform attempted to make registration easier for those groups who are underrepresented in the registered electorate. The purpose of this chapter is to examine whether or not the implementation of NVRA procedures resulted in the poor, the young, and racial minorities increasing their respective shares of the active voting population relative to their shares of the voting age population.

Turnout and Participation Inequality

The level of class inequality in participation is related to overall turnout levels. Across time, when turnout levels have decreased, class inequality in American elections has tended to increase. Conversely, the relatively high turnout elections in the 1960s witnessed lower levels of class inequality. (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993 241-244; Burnham, 1987; Leighly and Nagler, 1992. 729-730) Because class, race, and age tend to be highly related, I assume that the tendency of high-turnout elections to reduce class inequality should have the same effect on age and racial inequality. In order to examine the relationship between turnout and participation inequality among income, education, age, and racial groups I compare the distributions of voters from these groups (calculated from the 1992 and 1996 *Current Population Survey: Voter Supplemental*) in each state to the 1990 census distributions for these groups.

The measure of inequality¹ used is calculated as

$$Inequality = 100 * \sqrt{\sum (Part_i - Pop_i)^2}$$

¹ See Martinez and Hill (1997). See Appendix C for the descriptive statistics for this measure.

Where

Part, is the proportion of the electorate that belongs to group i (as measured by the 1996 CPS: *Voter Supplemental File*) and Pop, is the proportion of population that belongs to group i (as measured by the 1990 Census). Larger values on this measure indicate that one or more subgroups (education categories, for instance) comprise a much greater portion of the electorate than they comprise of the voting age population as a whole. A value of zero would indicate no bias; in other words, each group comprises the same share of the electorate that they comprise in the voting age population.²

Figure 4-1 displays three scatter plots for the relationship between turnout in 1992 and the four types of bias to be addressed in this chapter (income, education, age, and race).³ In the scatter plots for education and age, there is a clear

² Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993, 291-296) measures such as the Gini coefficient and the one used here are sensitive to over representation or underrepresentation of participation without respect to a group's place on the socioeconomic ladder. Thus, underrepresentation by middle education groups is treated the same as underrepresentation by lower education groups. Rosenstone and Hansen's EQ measure attempts to resolve that by comparing the representation ratios of the least privileged group to the most privileged group, without regard to the sizes of those groups. While that measure does acknowledge which ends of the socioeconomic ladder people occupy, it is also based on the participation of widely varying proportions of state populations. In this chapter, EQ would be based on only 21% of the voting age population of Alaska (14% with less than a high school education and 7% with a post-graduate degree), but 41% of the voting age population of the District of Columbia (26% with less than a high school education and 15% with a post-graduate degree). In Arkansas, EQ would be based on a comparison of a group representing 32% of the population (with less than a high school education) with another group representing less than 4% of the population (those with a post-graduate degree).

³ The measure used here is the Index of Inequality developed by Michael Martinez (Martinez and Hill, 1997). The measure compares the distribution of voters from a given group to that group's share of voting age population. A detailed description of the

negative linear relationship between the level of turnout and each of these biases. In fact, the states with the most equitable scores for education and age (Minnesota, North Dakota, Utah)⁴ have turnout rates of 72% 67% and 65% respectively, all of which are at least 10 percentage points above the national turnout of 55.2%. The states with the most inequitable scores on these measures (Kentucky, California, New Mexico, and Hawaii) had turnout rates of 54%, 49%, 51%, and 42% respectively, which are all below the national average of 55.2%. The scatter plots for education and age show that as turnout increases participation inequality decreases. The plot for race inequality is somewhat more ambiguous. There is a significant negative relationship between turnout and racial inequality, although it is clearly not as strong as the relationship between turnout and education and age inequality. The plot for income bias shows no relationship whatsoever in 1992, suggesting that as turnout increases, the inequality between those on the high end of the income spectrum and those on the low end of the spectrum does not necessarily decrease.

The results presented in Figure 4-1 suggest that as turnout increases the education, age, and racial biases should decrease. But these results also present a puzzle. There are clear, strong negative relationships between turnout and education and age inequality in 1992, while the relationship between turnout and racial

measure is given in the data and methods section.

⁴ Minnesota in addition to having the most equitable education score also had the most equitable age score. It comes as no surprise that two of these three states (Minnesota, and North Dakota) have two of the most liberal registration laws in the nation. Minnesota had same day registration, and active motor voter and agency-based programs, while North Dakota has no registration system whatsoever.

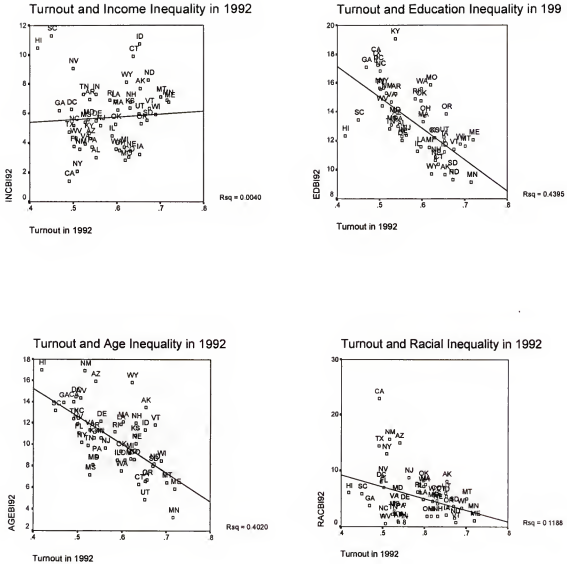


Figure 4-1. The Relationship Between Turnout and Participation Inequality

inequality is much weaker, though still negative. However, there appears to be no relationship between turnout and income inequality in 1992, suggesting that, at least within the context of the 1992 election, higher levels of turnout were not associated with greater participation among lower income groups. The 1996 election, however, was far different than the 1992 election. Turnout declined by six percentage points in 1996 and turnout declined in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Therefore, the likelihood that levels of income, education, age, or race inequality declined in 1996 is quite small. In fact, based on previous research we would expect inequality in participation to increase due to the substantial decrease in turnout. If the NVRA had any impact, however, we might expect that increases in participation inequality to be lessened somewhat by the inclusion of new voters from traditionally low participation groups such as the poor, the young, and racial minorities. Additionally, the negative relationship between turnout and inequality suggests that in those states which experienced higher levels of turnout in 1996 should experience lower levels of participation inequality. Although turnout declined in every state, we can hypothesize that those states which experienced the smallest declines may have witnessed decreases in their levels of income, education, age, and race inequality.

Table 4-1 examines the impact of turnout change between 1992 and 1996 on our four measures of inequality. In this model, the 1996 measures of inequality are regressed on the 1992 values and the change in turnout in 1996 from 1992. Turnout declined in all states, so the change in turnout variable is negative for all states. The first column in Table 4-1 estimates the impact of turnout change on income

inequality in 1996. There is a significant negative relationship between turnout change from 1992 to 1996 and the level of income inequality in 1996, while controlling for income inequality in 1992. This suggests that those states which experienced the smallest declines in turnout from 1992 to 1996 experienced the smallest increases in income inequality in 1996. This is somewhat surprising given that in 1992 the relationship between turnout and income inequality was very weak and nonsignificant. Was this the result of the implementation NVRA procedures? The simple test conducted here gives no information about whether or not the NVRA played a role in what appears to be a modest mobilization of lower income groups, but it does suggest something was different in 1996. None of the other measures of inequality indicate a significant relationship with turnout but education and age both have negative signs suggesting decreases in inequality were associated with smaller declines in turnout, which is consistent with the findings from 1992. The measure for racial inequality suggests that in those states which experienced the greatest declines in turnout experienced decreases in inequality. As with the measures for education and age, the coefficient for racial inequality is not significant, therefore we cannot be confident that the coefficient is discernable from zero.

The evidence in Figure 4-1 and Table 4-1 suggests that higher turnout levels could alleviate the class, age, and racial biases in state electorates. However, neither of the analyses considered implementation levels or a host of other factors which could influence turnout and inequality.

Table 4-1
Regression Estimates of the Impact of Turnout Change on 1996
Participation Inequality

	<i>Income</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race</i>
Inequality 1992	.212 (1.166)	.747** (.646)	.346** (3.304)	.614** (13.584)
Turnout Change 96-92	-38.185** (-2.438)	-12.833 (-.999)	-5.720 (-.456)	2.754 (.782)
Constant	7.993**	5.122**	10.323**	1.092
Adjusted R ²	.102	.365	.131	.787
N=50				
**p<.05				
Weighted Least Squares (Weighted by the square root of the voting age population)				
T-Values are in the parentheses				

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an in-depth exploration of the impact of the NVRA on the social composition of the electorate. The analysis in this chapter asks and answers one simple question. Did the implementation of NVRA procedures alleviate the underrepresentation of traditionally low turnout groups such as the poor, the young, and racial minorities?

Registration Procedures and the Social Composition of the Electorate

Research on registration laws and turnout suggests that the effect of restrictive registration laws has the greatest impact on the poor and less educated. Essentially, the increased burden imposed on the individual through registration requirements has a greater effect on those of lower socioeconomic status (particularly lower education) who are likely to find the interaction with a bureaucracy intimidating or not worth the

trouble (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Squire et al, 1987)⁵. Thus, the reduction of the costs of registration was seen as a key component in increasing turnout among the poor. In fact, Kim, Petrocik, and Enokson (1975) predicted that the liberalization of registration laws would result in a larger registered electorate which would be poorer, less educated, and contain a higher number of African Americans. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) agreed that the registered electorate would be expanded, and that this population of registered citizens would be composed a greater proportion of individuals who are poor and less educated, but the authors doubted that the social composition of the active, voting electorate would be substantially changed. They reasoned that, although there would be more poor and lower educated individuals in the pool of registered potential voters, those from the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder are simply far less likely to vote than those from the middle class and upper classes (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, several states began to address the negative impact of registration procedures by implementing motor voter and mail-in registration programs. At the time, Piven and Cloward (1983) argued that the reduction of the costs of registration by the implementation of agency-based registration would result in the inclusion of the poor and minorities into the active electorate. In their initial analysis of the potential impact of the NVRA, the authors predicted that motor voter provisions should result in compositional effects since

⁵ For a counter to this argument see Nagler (1991).

larger proportions of young people, minorities, and the poor drive than were registered to vote (Piven and Cloward, 1996).

Because nonvoting and nonregistration are largely concentrated among the young, minorities, and the poor, we would expect any impact of a reform which reduces registration barriers to have the greatest impact among these groups. Using individual level data from the National Election Study and the Current Population Survey, Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass (1987) remind us that individuals who are residentially mobile are much less likely to vote and part of the lower probability of voting among this group is due to the fact that they have to register (or re-register) every time they move. An individual who moves regularly is likely to conclude that the requirement of registration is simply too burdensome to bother with, or he or she simply may not be aware of the requirement of having to update their registration when leaving their precinct. The liberalization of registration requirements, then, is also likely to result in the inclusion of those who are residentially mobile (Squire et al. 1987; Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). Based on this perspective we would expect the availability of registration at public agencies (where the probability of contact with individuals from groups such as the young, mobile, poor, or minorities) should have positive effects on registration and subsequently, a positive impact on turnout and the social composition of the voting electorate.

Mitchell and Wlezien (1995) dampen the hope that the reduction of the costs of registration will have an effect on the social composition of the active electorate. Simulating compositional effects related to the relaxation of registration procedures

(elimination of closing dates, elimination of purges, and extended election office hours), the authors found that the impact of the liberalization of registration laws had a greater, although minimal, impact among the less educated than those with higher levels of education. Those with low levels of education are more likely to move into the population of registered voters than those with a college education. However, the change in the share of registered electorate for over half of the nineteen education groups (Kindergarten through six or more years of college) in the study is less than one-tenth of one percentage point. The changes produced in the voting population are even smaller and are quite consistent across education groups. The authors conclude that a general relaxation of registration laws would not produce notable changes in the registered or voting electorates for education, income, or racial groups (Mitchell and Wlezien, 1995: 192-193).

Highton's (1997) analysis of the impact of same day registration on turnout and the social composition of the electorate found that while turnout in states with same-day registration (Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin) and North Dakota, which has no registration system, was ten points higher than in the rest of the states,⁶ the effect on those with lower education in these states is not as great as some expected. Those with the lowest levels of education in same day states are slightly more likely to vote than their counterparts in other states. But the gap between those with the highest educational attainment and those with the lowest is still very wide (38 points) in election day states, which suggests that registration only partially accounts for the

⁶ These findings are consistent with Fenster (1994) and Briens (1997).

socioeconomic bias in the active electorate. Highton's findings indicate that while it may be reasonable to assume that the NVRA's reduction in registration costs should increase turnout, expectations concerning the ability of relaxed registration procedures to reduce class bias in the active electorate may be overstated (Highton, 1997: 573-574).

The work done by Mitchell and Wlezien (1995), Highton (1997), and Wolfinger and his colleagues suggests that, at best, the reduction in the costs in registration through the implementation of reforms such as the NVRA will produce an expanded registered electorate, which may be slightly more representative of previously excluded groups, but expectations concerning changing the social composition of the voting population are probably overstated, and any changes in the social composition of the active electorate are likely to be minimal.

There is some indication that motor voter procedures may even increase the class inequality in voting participation. In a study examining the patterns of registration and turnout at the county level in Michigan (the first state to implement motor voter procedures), Calvert (1997) found that education and residential mobility have stronger positive correlations with motor voter registration than with turnout. This suggests that those in higher social classes and movers are taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by motor voter (See Squire et al., 1987; Highton and Wolfinger 1995). "Motor voter in Michigan seems to generate a registered electorate that is more representative of the voting age population as a whole...while at the same

time those who actually vote are much less representative of the total universe...and more like those who actually vote in national elections (Calvert 1997, 372-373).

Calvert's findings suggest that those individuals who take advantage of easier registration tend to be those who are already predisposed to voting and for whatever reason prior to the implementation of the motor voter registration abstained from voting. Thus, while registration lists may become more "equalized" due to the registration of groups such as the young, poor, and racial minorities, the active electorate may become even more skewed because the type of individual taking advantage of motor voter procedures may resemble those who already participate. Simply put, the "Motor Voter" may possess the resources and political attitudes conducive to participation (see Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995).

Prior to the NVRA, the linkage between registration and voting was a result of the tendency of those individuals who took it upon themselves to register to possess the skills and attitudes conducive to participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Jackson, 1996). These individuals, therefore, tended to vote when the opportunity arose. It is possible that in the post-NVRA period the importance of registration may have been diminished somewhat in that it is no longer as steep an "investment" (Erikson, 1981) in participation; rather it may now simply be something one does while interacting with a public agency. Consequently those individuals with lower levels of attitudinal resources are less likely to enter the voting booth simply because they are registered (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995).

Initial analyses of the 1996 elections suggest that the success of the NVRA in decreasing participation inequality was mixed. Using three measures of inequality (Gini Index; Rosenstone and Hansen's EQ Index and their own Index of Inequality) Martinez and Hill (1997) found that the education, age, and racial biases in the electorate were slightly exacerbated in those states which changed their laws the most to come into compliance with the NVRA. Knack (1998), on the other hand, found that while there is no substantial evidence that implementation of NVRA procedures had any "progressive effects" on the biases in turnout based on race, education, income, or residential mobility, he did find that the turnout decline among the youngest members of the voting age population was lessened by the NVRA procedures. Furthermore, those states which adopted election day registration instead of NVRA procedures (Idaho, New Hampshire, and Wyoming) appeared to have witnessed a slight mobilization of young voters and a slight demobilization of those from lower income groups (Knack and White, 1998). Although these findings are somewhat tentative in that we only have one election to test the effects of the NVRA, the studies do suggest that the initial impact of the NVRA is mixed at best, in that there appears to have been a modest increase in the proportion of younger citizens in the voting electorate, and a slight decrease in those of lower status.

Based on previous research and initial analyses of 1996, one can conclude that all things being equal, the relaxation of registration will at best modestly contribute to an increase in the proportion of those who are young and residentially

mobile, and at worst create a voting electorate skewed toward those with higher levels of education and income.

The Importance of Mobilization

As we saw earlier, compositional effects are strongly related to turnout. In general, as turnout increases, the biases associated with class, age, and race tend to decrease. Because of this relationship we would expect the same conditions which foster increased turnout to also influence the composition of the voting public. The first condition, therefore, under which we would expect to see an impact on the composition of the active electorate would be those states which made the greatest changes to their laws. The assumption here is the same as in the previous chapter: states with previously liberalized registration systems would not be expected to see much change in the composition of their electorates because they made the fewest changes to their laws to come into compliance with the federal mandate. In other words, states which had registration procedures similar to the NVRA can be assumed to already have electorates affected by the liberalization of registration procedures, thus we would not expect to see great variation based on the imposition of NVRA procedures in these states. However, in states which were required to make changes to their procedures to come into compliance we would expect to see compositional effects because of the greater possibility of inclusion of new voters produced by the new changes. This effect should be accentuated in states which had to make the greatest changes to their registration systems to bring them in line with NVRA procedures.

In the previous chapter, we saw that the imposition of NVRA procedures alone had no real impact on state level turnout. When we examined the impact of NVRA procedures on turnout in conjunction with mobilizing conditions, however, we did find that increased campaign spending in states which made changes to their laws resulted in higher levels of turnout than increased spending in states with high levels of implementation prior to the new law. This is consistent with Jackson's (1996) argument that once an individual is registered he or she can then be induced into the voting booth by the politicized environment of the campaign season or actually mobilized by one of the two parties and their candidates. The question for this chapter then, is whether or not a competitive political context combined with the implementation of NVRA procedures to reduce participation inequality.

Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) argue that competitive elections with high turnout levels "expand the scope of conflict" and thereby increase the proportion of voters from lower status groups. Thus,

...when the stakes are high and the outcomes uncertain, politicians, political parties, interest groups, and activists devote greater efforts to mobilization. When political leaders offset the costs of political involvement—when they provide information, subsidize participation, occasion the provision of social rewards—they make it possible for people who have few resources of their own to participate. When leaders mobilize extensively, that is, they muster even the disadvantaged into politics (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 242).

From this perspective then, competitive elections create a context in which activists, groups, and political elites, find it in their best interest to attempt to mobilize those of lower status. In off-year elections the positive impact of income on electoral participation is weakened in the presence of a strong, highly visible, congressional

campaign. The heightened information provided by a vigorous challenge appears to reduce the information gap between those of lower and higher income and thus reduces the gap in participation (Jackson, 1993: 1095).

In presidential years, it appears that the ideological positions and the competitiveness of the Democratic party can affect the class structure of participation. Combining pooled-time series and cross-sectional analyses of state level turnout between 1978 and 1990, Hill and Leighley (1993) found that in presidential election years turnout among the working class and the poor was higher in those states in which the Democratic party was liberal and competitive. Thus, the high visibility and ideologically charged nature of the presidential campaign can accentuate attributes of the state-level party system and produce an environment in which the lower classes are induced into participation in those states with a competitive and liberal Democratic party.

There is reason, however, to suspect that mobilization efforts of the parties could lead to an increase in participation inequality. The increased information load within a competitive contest produces an information-rich environment which advantages those individuals best suited to deal with the increase information: those with higher levels of education (Jackson, 1993). The actions and strategies of the parties and elites themselves can also lead to a skewing of the voting electorate. In an effort to efficiently use resources the parties and their candidates tend to contact those individuals who are the easiest to find and are the most accessible. Members of voluntary associations are not only easy to identify and access by virtue of their

presence in the group, they are obviously participators given their presence in a voluntary association. Therefore, the parties actively target those individuals who belong the voluntary associations. Furthermore, it is in the best interest of the parties to attempt to mobilize those individuals who they believe will most likely vote. Both strategies tend to skew the strategies of the parties toward to those individuals who are upper status (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993).

Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992) found that the contacting strategies of the two major parties (in South Bend, Indiana) tended to create a bias of those who are contacted toward those with higher levels of education. The Republican party tended to focus on those individuals who had voted in the Republican primaries and lived in neighborhoods with a large proportion of Republican identifiers. The population of voters who participate in primary elections is skewed toward those of higher education, and neighborhoods with large numbers of Republican identifiers tend to have higher levels of income and education, because of their strategy to target these two groups, the Republicans contacted their natural constituency of upper status individuals. The natural Democratic constituency, on the other hand, is found among those of lower status. The democratic strategy of focusing solely on individuals who voted in the Democratic primary, however, tends to bias the party's contact efforts towards those of upper status (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992: 77-78). Thus, both the Democrats and Republicans pursue strategies which point them toward those of higher status, which leads to a further skewing of the voting population toward those with higher levels of education.

Previous research on political mobilization suggests that the increased mobilization efforts of parties during competitive elections can have positive effects on turnout. In fact, the models in the previous chapter indicate there were modest positive effects on turnout in those states which made the greatest changes to their registration systems and experienced increased levels of campaign spending in their House and Senate races. The literature on mobilization also suggests that within the context of competitive elections we might expect to see an increase in the proportion of lower status individuals into the voting electorate due to increased information and mobilization efforts of the two parties and their candidates. The effect of competitive campaigns and mobilization efforts on the social structure of participation is dependent, however, on the actions of the parties themselves. If the parties pursue strategies designed to maximize the effectiveness of their efforts by contacting those individuals most likely to participate, then it is very likely the parties are contributing to the bias in the active electorate toward those individuals and groups who are already likely to vote. The task for this chapter then, is to explore whether or not the competitiveness of the presidential campaign and the mobilization efforts of the two parties combined with the changes produced by the NVRA (in some states) to affect the social structure of participation? Specifically, I ask what effect did the implementation of NVRA procedures and the election season have upon the income, education, age, and racial participation biases in states electorates?

Data and Methods

The analysis in this chapter will examine whether or not the NVRA had an impact on the proportion of voters in each state from the young, racial minorities, and those of lower socioeconomic status (measured as income and education) relative to their proportion of the voting age population. For each social grouping the measure of participation inequality will be regressed on inequality in 1992, dummy variables for prior implementation NVRA procedures, a dummy variable for new election day states, a dummy for delayed implementation, change in the U.S. Senatorial calendar, change in the margin of victory in the presidential contest from 1992 to 1996, and the change in the log of campaign expenditures from 1992 to 1996. The model can be expressed as

$$\text{Inequality}_{96} = a + b_1 \text{Inequality}_{92} + b_2 \text{Low Implementation}_{92} + b_3 \text{Moderate Implementation}_{92} + b_4 \text{New Election Day} + b_5 \text{Delayed Implementation} + b_6 \text{Presidential Margin}_{92-96} + b_7 \text{Senate Race} + b_8 \text{Campaign Spending}_{96-92} + e$$

where Inequality_{96} is the Index of Inequality Score for a given population (as indicated by the *CPS*) in 1996. The lag term (Inequality_{92}) controls for all factors (registration laws, political culture, the distribution of resources) that accounted for the variation between the states in the proportion of voters who were from one of the chosen populations in 1992. The coefficients for the motor voter variables capture the effect of the NVRA on the mobilization of the given population in each state, while the delay variable measures the negative impact that delaying the implementation of the NVRA could have on the social composition of the active electorate. The dummy variable for the new election day states represents those states

(Idaho, New Hampshire, and Wyoming) which adopted election day registration rather than implement NVRA procedures. The variables for change in the senate electoral calendar, the closeness of the presidential contest and the change in party competition in the state house capture the mobilization effects of campaigns upon the composition of a state electorate.⁷

Results

Income Effects

The first test to gauge the composition effects associated with the implementation of the NVRA is for income groups. Earlier we saw that higher turnout levels had no impact on income inequality in 1992. But now we can ask: did the implementation of NVRA procedures in states which had to make changes to their laws to comply with the law reduce the inequality in participation between income groups in 1996? As in the previous chapter, the analysis begins with an examination of the additive model, which allows us to gauge the independent effects of changes in state registration procedures while controlling for the mobilization effects (presidential margin, the presence of a senate race, and campaign spending) of the campaign season.

Model A in Table 4-2 provides the estimates of income inequality in 1996 produced by the additive model. The lag term for inequality for 1992 tells us how how stability in participation bias there was between 1992 and 1996. A coefficient of one would indicate that all those factors influencing income inequality in 1992

⁷ See the previous chapter for the measurement of the variables in this model.

Table 4-2
Regression Estimates of Income Inequality in 1996

	Model A	Model B
Income Inequality 92	.323 (.207)	.301 (.212)
Low Implementation 92	-1.072 (1.204)	.624 (1.530)
Moderate Implementation 92	-.670 (1.237)	.905 (1.675)
Delayed Implementation	-.394 (.887)	-.501 (.912)
New Election Day States	-1.245 (2.625)	-.577 (2.687)
Margin 92-96	.253** (.082)	-.03 (1.128)
Senate Race	-.413 (.532)	-1.802 (1.128)
Campaign Expenditures96-92	.140 (.277)	.05 (.257)
Margin*Low		.441* (.244)
Margin*Moderate		.239 (.246)
Senate Race*Low		1.659 (1.737)
Senate race*Moderate		2.821 (2.383)
Spend*Low		1.063 (2.004)
Spend*Moderate		-1.755 (2.567)
Constant	11.630**	10.46**
R ²	.279	.386
R ² Change		.107
Adjusted R ²	.138	.140
N=50		
*p<.10 **P<.05		
Weighted Least Squares (Weighted by the square of the voting age population)		
Standard Errors are in the parentheses		

influenced income inequality in 1996. A coefficient of zero would indicate that those factors influencing income bias in 1992 played no role in income bias in 1996. We can see that the coefficient for bias in 1992 is very small and nonsignificant, suggesting that the factors influencing income inequity in 1992 are very different from those in 1992 and we can assume that the "construction" of income bias in 1996 was very different from 1992. Both of the coefficients for prior implementation, while nonsignificant, suggest that in those states which made changes to their laws experienced lower levels of income inequity in 1996 than those states which already had fairly liberalized registration laws

Interestingly, the coefficient for the change in the competitiveness level of the presidential contest is significant at well below conventional levels. This variable suggests that those states which experienced a more competitive presidential contest in 1996 than in 1992 also experienced increases in the level of income inequality. The presence of a Senate race in 1996 but not in 1992 appears to have resulted in a slight decrease in income inequality. Finally, increases in campaign spending in congressional races appears to have resulted in a slight demobilization of lower income groups, although as with the other variables in the model (excluding presidential margin) the variable is not statistically discernable from zero and should be viewed with caution. On the whole, the additive model suggests that the implementation of NVRA procedures appears to have had a very small negative impact on the level of income inequality in state electorates. Keeping with the assumptions of this project, however, the greatest impact on income inequality

should be seen in those states which made the greatest changes to their laws *and* experienced at least one or all of three mobilizing conditions (presidential margin, the presence of a senate race, campaign spending).

Model B in Table 4-2 presents the interaction model estimates of income inequality in 1996. As with the models for turnout, I have included multiplicative terms to capture the interaction between the implementation of NVRA procedures and the three mobilization characteristics defined in this project. It is important to note that all the estimates in the model are relative to states which had previously adopted liberalized registration procedures. As in Model A, the coefficient for inequality in 1992 is small and nonsignificant, suggesting that factors influencing income inequality in 1992 played a small role in the construction of inequality in 1996. Interestingly, when we control for the interactive effects of NVRA implementation and mobilizing conditions, the direction of the implementation variables changes. In the additive model, the coefficients for low and moderate implementation states suggested that these states experienced lower levels of income inequality than high implementation states. In Model B these variables now suggest that, controlling for the other variables in the model, those states which made moderate or major changes to their laws, and had no change in the election margin in the presidential contest, no change in Senate calendar, and had no change in the level of campaign expenditures, on average, experienced slightly higher levels of income inequality than states which had already facilitative systems. While these coefficients are not statistically discernable from zero, they do suggest that the

independent effects of implementing NVRA procedures may have resulted in state electorates slightly more skewed toward upper income groups.

The variables for the mobilization effects of the campaign now represent the effects of these conditions in states with high levels of implementation prior to the NVRA. For those states, the change in the competitiveness of the presidential election and the presence of a Senate race appears to have resulted in a slight decrease in income inequality. The change in levels of campaign spending in high implementation states also appears to have resulted in higher levels of income inequality. None of the three variables are statistically significant; therefore, our confidence that they are accurate reflections of the impact of mobilization in high implementation states is quite low. For our purposes, however, we are interested in the impact of these factors in states which made changes to their registration procedures, and the examination of the interaction terms in the model will allow us to determine the impact of each mobilizing condition within low and moderate implementation states.

The variables capturing the impact of the change in the competitiveness of the presidential contest in states which made some or major changes to their laws indicate that as the competitiveness of the presidential race increased (as the margin decreased) there was an *increase* in income inequality relative to states which made minimal changes to their laws. The variable for presidential margin and low implementation is significant and the coefficient suggests that for every one point decrease in margin of victory in 1996, the income bias measure in low

implementation states is a little less than half a point higher (.411) than in liberalized states with the same decrease in presidential margin. On the whole, a one point decrease in the margin of victory in 1996 in states which made moderate changes resulted in a nonsignificant increase in income inequality of about one-fifth of a point (.209).⁸

The presence of a Senate Race in 1996 but not 1992 also resulted in a *higher* income bias in states which made changes to their laws relative to the states which made minimal changes to their laws. The coefficients are not statistically significant but do suggest the increased mobilization of a Senate race tended to increase the inequality in participation between those highest on the income ladder and those on the lowest end, when compared to states which made minimal changes to their laws. Finally, in states which made major changes to their registration procedures, an increase in campaign spending appears to have resulted in higher levels of inequality than in high implementation states with the same levels of spending. In moderate implementation states changes in the level of campaign spending resulted in lower levels of inequality, than in liberalized states with the same changes in spending.

The results of the exploration of the impact of the NVRA on income inequality suggest that, contrary to the expectations of many, the implementation of NVRA procedures resulted in *increases* in income inequality. Furthermore, mobilization conditions created by the political environment not only did not

⁸ This is calculated by adding the coefficients of the Margin92-96 variable and the Margin*Low variable. See Hardy (1993: 37).

alleviate the increase in those states which made the greatest changes to their procedures. In fact, increases in the competitiveness of the presidential contest in these states resulted in modest *increases* in income bias. The methods and data used in this analysis provide us with no concrete information to explain this possibly counterintuitive finding. We would expect an increase in the competition in the presidential election in a state to mobilize lower status individuals. Furthermore, we would expect that the increased numbers of potential voters produced in those states which underwent the greatest changes to their laws would result in a decrease in the inequality in participation between income groups within a competitive political environment, in which the parties and candidates found it necessary to mobilize potential supporters. However, as our discussion of mobilization highlighted, the effect of mobilization efforts is dependent upon the strategies and actions of the two parties. If the parties chose to target those individuals most easily found and/or most likely to vote, then they most likely did not contact individuals of lower status. They contacted citizens of higher status, and therefore simply mobilized those already part of the active electorate. It is also possible that the parties may have, indeed, contacted NVRA registrants in these competitive contexts, and these individuals were those new registrants who were of higher status. If this is the case, the addition of higher status new voters to the active electorate in these competitive and newly facilitative contexts may have resulted in increases in income inequality.

Education Effects

Model A in Table 4-3 presents the additive model estimates of education bias in 1996. The coefficient for the lag term capturing education bias in 1992 is statistically significant and fairly large, which suggests that there is a great deal of stability in education inequality between 1992 and 1996. When we control for other factors in the model, states which made moderate or great changes to their registration procedures experienced education inequality levels slightly higher than states which made minimal changes to their laws. When we control for the implementation variables we can see that, as with the income analysis, increases in the competitiveness of the presidential election resulted in statistically significant *increases* in educational inequality. The presence of a Senate race in 1996 but not in 1992 resulted in decreases educational inequality, while increases in campaign spending resulted in slight increases in inequality between educational groups.

Model B in Table 4-3 provides the estimates for the interactive model provides the estimates for the interactive model of educational inequality in 1996. The lag term for inequality remains fairly large and significant. When we control for the joint effects of mobilization and implementation, states with low or moderate implementation in 1992, which had no changes in the competitiveness of the presidential election, no changes in the Senate electoral calendar, and no changes in the level of campaign expenditures, on average, experienced higher levels of inequality in 1996 than states with high levels of implementation in 1992. Thus, the

Table 4-3
Regression Estimates of Education Inequality in 1996

	Model A	Model B
Education Inequality 92	.574** (.152)	.525** (.163)
Low Implementation 92	.573 (1.007)	2.340* (1.294)
Moderate Implementation 92	.820 (.988)	2.154 (1.367)
Delayed Implementation	.062 (.693)	.166 (.720)
New Election Day States	-.672 (2.109)	-.373 (2.175)
Margin 92-96	.144** (.066)	-.09 (.970)
Senate Race	-.323 (.432)	-1.266 (.940)
Campaign Expenditures96-92	.103 (.206)	.03 (.224)
Margin*Low		.292 (.200)
Margin*Moderate		.259 (.202)
Senate race*Low		2.119 (1.422)
Senate race*Moderate		.489 (1.961)
Spend*Low		-1.753 (1.628)
Spend*Moderate		1.114 (2.148)
Constant	8.266**	7.575**
R ²	.463	.533
R ² Change		.07
Adjusted R ²	.358	.347

N=50

*p<.10 **p.05

Weighted Least Squares (Weighted by the square of the voting age population)

Standard Errors are in the parentheses

independent effect of implementation of NVRA procedures in states which made the greatest changes to their laws produced inequality significantly higher than in states with already liberalized registration systems. Within high implementation states, the change in the competitiveness of the presidential election the presence of a Senate race, and increased levels of spending did not have a significant impact on the level of educational inequality, although the coefficient for Senate variable suggests the presence of a Senate in race in 1996 but not in 1992 in states with already facilitative registration systems may have had a fairly substantial negative impact upon educational inequality.

Within states which made the greatest changes to their laws, increases in the competitiveness of the presidential contest resulted in *higher* levels (nonsignificant) of educational inequality than in high implementation states with the same condition. The impact of the presidential contest was very similar in states which made moderate changes to their laws, with increases in competitiveness resulting in modestly higher levels of inequality than in high implementation states. The presence of a Senate race in 1996 and not 1992 appears to have had a fairly strong, if not significant, impact on educational inequality in states which made substantial changes to their laws. In those states which had to make major changes to their systems had inequality levels about eight tenths of one point higher than in states which made minimal changes to their laws. The impact of Senate races was somewhat smaller and in the opposite direction in moderate implementation states. In those states which had to make some but not major changes to their registration

systems had inequality scores about seven-tenths of point lower than in high implementation states. Finally, the changes in the level of campaign spending in states which made major changes to their laws resulted in inequality levels (nonsignificant) lower (1.7 points) than in high implementation states with the same levels of spending, while spending in moderate implementation states appears to have resulted in inequality scores higher (one point) than in high implementation states.

The only variables of interest in both models of education bias attaining levels of statistical significance are the presidential competition change variable in the additive model and the dummy variable for those states which made the greatest changes to their laws to come into compliance with the NVRA in the interactive model. Both of these coefficients have positive signs suggesting that two of the factors we would expect to bring about a narrowing of the gap between education groups actually resulted in slight increases in educational inequality. Notably, the implementation of NVRA procedures in states which had to make major changes to their laws resulted in *higher* levels of education inequality than in those which made little or no changes to their procedures to comply with the NVRA. Taken as a whole, then, this model, as with the analysis for income inequality, tells us that the relaxation of registration procedures through the implementation of the NVRA resulted in an active electorate even more skewed toward those of higher socioeconomic status. The political environment, rather than alleviating this increase in inequality, appears to have slightly exacerbated this inequality in those states which underwent the greatest levels of implementation.

Age Effects

The analysis for the impact of the NVRA on age inequality in state electorates illustrates a strong effect of the NVRA on the differential voting rates between older and younger Americans. Examining the additive model in Table 4-4 (Model A) the impact of delayed implementation becomes significant for the first time. States which were classified as having delayed implementation of NVRA procedures experienced age inequality scores 1.3 points higher than states which did not delay implementation. Unlike the analyses for income and education groups, obstruction on the part of state officials had a negative effect on the turnout of younger citizens. The coefficients for prior implementation are negative (although nonsignificant), suggesting that the implementation of NVRA procedures in states which had to make moderate or major changes led to relatively lower levels of inequality between older and younger citizens.

The change in the closeness of the presidential election had no substantial impact on the inequality between age groups while the presence of a Senate appears to have had a slight mobilizing effect on younger Americans. What effect did mobilization have on age inequality in states which made changes to their laws compared to the effects of mobilization in high implementation states? Looking at the interactive model (Model B) one can see the lag term for age inequality is statistically significant and fairly large which suggests a fair degree of stability between 1992 and 1996. However, there appear to be substantial effects of implementation on age inequality. Controlling for the joint effects of

Table 4-4
Regression Estimates of Age Inequality in 1996

	Model A	Model B
Age Inequality 92	.405** (.119)	.510** (.129)
Low Implementation 92	-1.629 (.996)	-3.395** (1.321)
Moderate Implementation 92	-1.488 (.939)	-3.659** (1.330)
Delayed Implementation	1.272* (.641)	1.135* (.648)
New Election Day States	-1.777 (2.018)	-2.659 (2.092)
Margin 92-96	.02 (.061)	.236 (.159)
Senate Race	-.220 (.385)	.534 (.860)
Campaign Expenditures96-92	.240 (.192)	.361* (.207)
Margin*Low		-.186 (.183)
Margin*Moderate		-.286 (.187)
Senate race*Low		-1.122 (1.296)
Senate race*Moderate		-.655 (1.462)
Spend*Low		1.439 (1.462)
Spend*Moderate		-1.498 (1.926)
Constant	10.908**	11.296**
R ²	.291	.416
R ² Change		.125
Adjusted R ²	.153	.182

N=50

*p<.10 **p.05

Weighted Least Squares (Weighted by the square root of the voting age population)

Standard Errors are in the parentheses

implementation and mobilization, the delay of implementation coefficient remains substantial and significant. The two variables for prior implementation are significant at well below the conventional levels and in the negative direction. This tells us that while controlling for other variables in the model, those states which made changes to the registration laws in order to comply with the NVRA, and had no changes in the levels of mobilization experienced substantially *lower levels* of the age inequality in their active electorates, than in states with already liberalized registration laws. All things being equal then, the implementation of NVRA procedures led to a significant decrease in the level of inequality between age groups.

The variables capturing the possible mobilization effects of the presidential campaign, although nonsignificant, suggest that increasing competitiveness of the presidential contest slightly increased the age inequality in high implementation states. The presence of a Senate race did not appear to have any impact whatsoever on age inequality in these states, but higher levels of campaign spending are significantly related to modest increases in age inequality. The impact of mobilizing conditions in states which made major or moderate changes to their laws is quite modest, and in fact none of the variables representing mobilization conditions within these states is significant, suggesting that on the whole political conditions had little to no effect on age inequality in states which made changes to their laws.

The analysis of the impact of the implementation of NVRA procedures on age inequality in state electorates suggests that the relaxation of registration procedures resulted in *significant decreases* in the inequality in participation between older and

younger Americans. Furthermore, the delayed implementation of NVRA procedures on the part of many states appears to have stunted what could have been even an even greater mobilization of younger citizens. Interestingly, it appears that the increased convenience of registration produced by the implementation of NVRA procedures was enough to mobilize young voters into the voting and the additional mobilization potential of the political campaign had very little to do with the decrease in age inequality in those states which made moderate and major changes to their laws.

Race Effects

The examination of the additive model (Model A) in Table 4-5 does not produce clear-cut findings concerning the impact of NVRA procedures on racial inequality. The lag term for inequality in 1992 is quite large and significant suggesting fairly high degree in the construction of racial inequality between 1992 and 1996. Both of the coefficients (nonsignificant) capturing the implementation of NVRA procedures, while controlling for other factors, indicate that the inequality scores in states which made some or major changes to their procedures were lower than in states which made minimal changes to their laws. The presidential margin did not have much of an impact on the racial bias, but direction of the coefficient suggests that as the competitiveness of the presidential increases racial inequality increases. The presence of a Senate race in 1996 but not 1992 had a modest but negative effect on racial inequity, suggesting the increased interest and mobilization of Senatorial campaigns resulted in a slight mobilization of racial minorities. Finally,

Table 4-5
Regression Estimates of Race Inequality in 1996

	Model A	Model B
Race Inequality 92	.602** (.051)	.625** (.129)
Low Implementation 92	-.414 (.808)	.02 (.984)
Moderate Implementation 92	-.379 (.796)	.816 (1.050)
Delayed Implementation	.308 (.563)	.462 (.559)
New Election Day States	.03 (1.679)	.309 (1.662)
Margin 92-96	.07 (.053)	-.05 (.132)
Senate Race	-.546 (.344)	-.954 (.705)
Campaign Expenditures96-92	.08 (.165)	.02 (.172)
Margin*Low		.04 (.154)
Margin*Moderate		.229 (.156)
Senate race*Low		-.192 (1.093)
Senate race*Moderate		.239 (1.492)
Spend*Low		.09 (1.299)
Spend*Moderate		1.512 (1.602)
Constant	1.383*	.581
R ²	.817	.854
R ² Change		.037
Adjusted R ²	.781	.796

N=50

*p<.10 **p.05

Weighted Least Squares (Weighted by the square root of the voting age population)
Standard Errors are in the parentheses

the impact of the change in levels of spending appeared to have a very slight, positive (but nonsignificant) impact on racial inequality.

The addition of the multiplicative terms in the interactive model produces somewhat mixed results (Model B). The lag term for inequality remains largely unchanged with the addition of the interaction terms, and none of the variables in the model are truly statistically discernable from zero. Interestingly, the direction of the coefficients for prior implementation change direction, now indicating that when we control for the joint effects of implementation and mobilization that states which made moderate or substantial changes to their registration procedures and did not experience changes in the competitiveness of the presidential election, the Senate electoral calendar, or the level of campaign spending, on average, had racial inequality levels higher than states with facilitative systems prior to the NVRA. Neither of these variables are significant, and the magnitude of each is fairly small. Therefore, we shouldn't place too much emphasis in the interpretation of them.

The variables representing mobilizing conditions in high implementation states indicate that increases in the competitiveness of the presidential election, and the presence of a Senate race both led to modest decreases in the racial inequality scores for these states. Changes in the level of campaign spending again had very little impact on the level of racial inequality in high implementation states. When we examine the impact of mobilizing conditions in states which made moderate or major changes to their laws, the presidential contest had very little impact on the level of racial inequality in states which moderate or major changes to their laws, although

what impact was felt was positive and occurred in states which made moderate changes to their laws rather than states which made substantial changes to their laws. The presence of a Senate race in 1996 appears to have resulted in a modest negative effect on racial inequality in 1996 suggesting that the mobilization potential of the Senatorial campaign in the states which made moderate or major changes to their laws resulted in racial inequality scores lower than in high implementation states with the same conditions.

The clearest thing one can say about the findings for racial inequality, is that it appears the implementation of NVRA had very little impact on the level of racial inequality in participation in state electorates. Furthermore, the combination of NVRA implementation and state mobilization conditions did not appear to produce any substantial effects on the differential voting rates between white and racial minorities.

Discussion

In this chapter, I attempted to gauge the short-term impact of the NVRA on the income, education, age, and racial biases in state electorates. The main assumption of the analysis is that, to the degree that the NVRA had an impact on the social composition of the electorate, we should have seen the greatest changes in those states which had to make the greatest changes to their registration systems in order to comply with the NVRA *and* possessed a political environment conducive to political mobilization.

The findings of the analysis are mixed. It appears that the implementation of NVRA procedures resulted in a substantial decrease in the inequality in participation between age groups. Considering that many of the supporters of the reform targeted younger Americans as a potential source of increased participation as a result of the relaxation of registration procedures, the NVRA would have to be considered a short-term success. Given that many young individuals are highly mobile, better educated, but not interested enough in the complexities of politics to overcome the bureaucratic barriers imposed by restrictive registration, it is not surprising that many young individuals were induced into the voting booth by convenient registration procedures. Additionally, considering that the analyses concerning income and education suggest that there was a modest increase in levels of income and education inequality associated with the implementation of NVRA procedures, the law may have had the greatest impact on young, middle class, educated (or at least in college) individuals. Thus, while the NVRA might be considered a success in increasing participation among one low participation group (young Americans), it may have done so while also creating a greater gap between those of low and higher socioeconomic status.

Interestingly, mobilizing conditions within states which underwent implementation had very little impact on the levels of social inequality in participation, and to the extent that mobilizing did have an impact it tended to accentuate the increase in inequity. On the surface, this is counterintuitive. In those states which underwent the greatest changes to their registration systems, there should have been an increase in the proportion of individuals from low participation

groups in the registered electorate, because it was these states which had the greatest potential for increases in registration due to the loosening of their restrictive registration systems. The NVRA did nothing to facilitate the act of voting, however. The reform simply made the act of registration easier, and there is no reason to believe that an individual who registered under these procedures voted simple because of the convenience of registration.

In those states in which the election season produced competitive context, though, we might expect that the increased interest of the campaign and the actions of the parties would result in the mobilization of citizens from groups such as those of lower status or racial minorities. Yet, if the strategies of the parties and their candidates focus their energies and resources on the contacting of individuals who the most likely to vote (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993) then it is likely that most of new NVRA registrants from these disadvantaged groups may have been ignored by the two parties in their registration efforts. On the other hand, the parties may have been successful at contacting new registrants, in that they may have maintained their strategies of contacting those most likely to vote, and thus mobilized those individuals registering under NVRA procedures, and who possessed personal characteristics conducive to participation such as higher levels of education and interest in political affairs. If this is what occurred, then the increases in income and educational inequality are quite reasonable, in that the mobilization strategies of the two parties and their candidates combined with increased numbers of middle

class registrants to produce an active electorate even more skewed toward those of higher status.

CHAPTER 5

THE EXPLORATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL EFFECTS OF THE NVRA

In Part I we examined the macro effects of the implementation of NVRA procedures on state level turnout and the social composition of state electorates. Overall it appears the reform produced mixed results in 1996. The implementation of NVRA procedures had no significant impact on overall state level turnout. However, the reform did result in slight changes in the social composition of state electorates. Contrary to the expectations of many supporters, states which made the greatest changes to their laws in order to comply with the new law experienced *higher* levels of participation inequality among education groups than states which made minimal changes to their laws. The law also resulted in a slight reduction in the participation inequality between older and young Americans. In other words, it appears that the NVRA mandated relaxation of registration requirements resulted in the mobilization of young people into the voting electorate. Finally, the reform had no discernable impact on the tendency of the voting electorate to be skewed toward white Americans.

The analysis in Part I gives us insight into the aggregate level effects of the reform in 1996. However, while electoral reform should ultimately produce changes at the macro-level, electoral reform does so by affecting the behavior of individuals.

Thus, it is important that we examine the effect of the law on individual level behavior. As discussed earlier, the NVRA is a registration reform, in that it attempts to increase levels of registration by placing the opportunity to register in front of as many individuals as possible. Furthermore, many supporters expected the convenience of NVRA registration to result in the inclusion of individuals from low participation groups such as the young, the poor, and racial minorities. The first question to be asked then in an empirical investigation of the reform is whether or not the relaxation of registration procedures increased the probability of certain individuals registering to vote. In other words, did the law increase the probability of registering to vote for an individual from a target group such as the young, or those of lower socioeconomic status? Or did the law register those individuals already likely to register such as middle class citizens?

While the NVRA is intended to increase the number of registered citizens and transform the social composition of the registered electorate, if no one who registers under the law votes then the reform has no real substantial impact on the American electoral process. Thus, it is also important that we determine whether or not the implementation of the NVRA increased the probability of individuals from the target groups voting once registered under these procedures. The analysis in Part II, then, will focus on what types of individuals registered under each of the three methods provided by the NVRA and what the likelihood that an individual registering under these procedures would vote when compared to individuals

registering under more traditional methods of registration such as visiting an elections office.

Registration and Voting

The logic of the NVRA is quite simple. Registration requirements are seen as and impediment to electoral participation and therefore the removal, or relaxation, of these barriers should increase turnout. The high turnout rates among registered citizens across time supports this logic (Erikson, 1981; Piven and Cloward, 1990; Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1990). Erikson (1981) argued that the reason registered citizens voted at such high rates was that they were registered to vote. He reasoned that the registered citizen considered the effort put forth to overcome the bureaucratic barriers of registration an investment in the act of participation. In other words, an individual who took the time and effort to travel to an elections office to register the vote, did so with the intention of voting. Thus, once these individuals were registered they tended to vote at fairly high rates. This tendency is even found among those with the lowest probability of participating in elections. Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass (1987) found that once registered, even those of lower levels of education tended to participate at rates very similar to those with higher levels of education. It appears, therefore, that once an individual overcomes the barriers to registration, even those with lower levels of skills and resources conducive to participation, are likely to participate in elections.

The above discussion highlights the fact that voting in the United States is a two-step process. In order to participate in an election an individual must register to

vote (first-step) and once registered to vote the individual is then allowed to actually cast a ballot in an election (second-step) (Erikson, 1981; Jackson, 1996). Contrast this with the process of electoral participation in other democracies. The standard form of registration in most other democracies is for the citizen to be placed on the registration rolls upon reaching the prescribed voting age (Powell, 1986; Franklin, 1996). In this context of automatic registration the act of registration requires little to no thought and no effort. The state takes the responsibility for placing the individual on the registration rolls, and thus the citizen only has to worry about showing up on election day to cast a ballot. Prior to the NVRA, the two-step process of voting in the United States, placed all of the onus for registration and voting upon the individual. And thus, registration in the United States stood as a rather substantial hurdle an individual had to overcome in order to participate in an election.

Viewing electoral participation as a two-step process highlights the notion that registration and voting are two different acts. Timpone (1998) argues that registering to vote differs from the act of voting in three ways. First, registration differs from voting in place. Except in those states in which the potential voter is allowed to register on the day of the election at the polling place, individuals must register at a location which is different from their actual precinct. Prior to the NVRA this probably meant traveling to the elections office.¹ In order to be able to take part

¹ Prior to the implementation of the NVRA many states had motor voter programs, and/or mail-in programs and several states made registration opportunities available at public agencies such as welfare offices. However, all of these places differ in place than the polling location and therefore, still place the imposition of having to register at a different location than the polling place.

in an election an individual was required to travel to an elections office or some other prescribed location, to place his or her name on the registration rolls, and for some the requirement was more than a simple extra inconvenient step in the process of electoral participation. In fact, for many individuals this requirement could be quite a substantial hurdle. In order to register at an elections office, an individual had to have knowledge of the requirement of elections office registration. Second, the individual had to determine where the place of registration was located, and finally, the individual had to have the ability (and time) to travel to the location. Individuals of lower socioeconomic status, are less likely to have knowledge of the requirement, less likely to know where the elections office is, and less likely to have the ability to travel to the office than an individual of higher socioeconomic status (is Wolfinger and Rosenstone a good cite for this). Therefore, the obstacle of place may have a particular effect on those of lower status.²

Second, registration differs from voting in time. Other than in those states which allow election day registration, the potential voter is required to register a specified period of time prior to the election. Closing the registration rolls a substantial amount of time before the election (for example, 30 days) places a

² Highton (1997) found that the differential turnout rates between individuals of higher socioeconomic status and those of lower status, was lower in states with someday registration than in states without someday registration. However, the gap between those of highest educational attainment (advanced degree) and those with the lowest level of education (less than high school) was 38 points, suggesting that eliminating the barriers of place, time, and kind will only have marginal effects in increasing the participation of those of lower status.

substantial time barrier between the citizen and the voting booth (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). In most instances, the height of intensity and public visibility of a competitive campaign occurs within the last month of the election, and presumably, many unregistered citizens could be induced into the voting booth by the campaign itself. Prohibiting registration at the peak of the campaign season, then, places a barrier before the potential (but unregistered) voter who may be mobilized by the politicized nature of the election itself or one of the two main parties (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Mitchell and Wlezien, 1995; Jackson, 1996).

Finally, registration differs from voting in kind. Registering to vote is an administrative act one must complete before being allowed to vote. Voting, on the other hand, is a political act in which the citizen is attempting to influence the outcome of the election (Timpone, 1998; Brians, 1998). Because of this, the two step process of electoral participation in the United States combines two fundamentally different acts. Some people may feel uncomfortable with having to complete this bureaucratic task (Timpone, 1998), while others may find having to fulfill the requirement simply not worth the effort, such as when an individual has to re-register when moving changing residences (Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass, 1987).

Timpone's discussion of the differences between registration and voting illustrate that the registration requirement prior to the NVRA was not simply inconvenient. An individual who wanted to participate in an election was forced to overcome the barriers of place and time, in order to fulfill a bureaucratic requirement

which was fundamentally different and separate from the political act of casting a ballot in an election.

The above discussion, highlights the need to examine registration and voting as two separate activities, in which different forces may play a role in the probability of an individual participating in each (Jackson, 1996; Timpone, 1998). In fact, many factors believed to influence the probability of voting are instead strong determinants of the probability of registration. For example, Jackson (1996) and Timpone (1998) both found that when we analytically separate the acts and examine them in different analyses individual characteristics such as education, income, age, and residential mobility are stronger determinants of registration than the probability of voting.³ Related to socioeconomic characteristics such as education and income are attitudes toward the political system, long believed to be key determinants of electoral participation. Timpone also found that when registration and voting are examined separately, attitudes such as external political efficacy (belief in government responsiveness); internal efficacy (belief in personal capabilities), party differences, and strength of partisan identification are significant predictors of registration but not turnout (Timpone, 1998). Factors accepted as not having an impact on participation such as gender and race, when viewed in the separate processes framework become important predictors of the probability of voting. For example, women are less likely to register than men, but are more likely to vote once they are registered than their

³ Mitchell and Wlezien (1995) found that the impact of education, income, and age on registration was not substantially different from turnout.

male counterparts. There are no significant differences in the probability of registering between African-Americans and whites, but African-Americans are significantly less likely to vote once registered than whites (Jackson, 1996; Timpone, 1998).

When registration and voting are viewed as separate processes then, the answer to why people vote is no longer as clear as saying "because they are registered." In fact, the question becomes why do people register? And the answer is that prior to the NVRA, those individuals who registered to vote tended to have higher levels of education, they were older, and they possessed the socio-political attitudes conducive to political participation (Jackson, 1996; Timpone, 1998). In a sense these individuals, because of the skills and resources they possessed, were more likely to overcome the three barriers (place, time, and kind) placed in front of the potential voter by the American system of individual registration (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Squire et. Al. 1987; Verba, Brady, and Schlozman, 1995). Because of this, the registered electorate tended to be skewed toward the middle classes and those who possessed the skills and attitudes conducive to participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). Participation rates among this group of individuals were therefore quite high (Piven and Cloward, 1990; Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1990).

The success of election day registration in increasing turnout (Fenster, 1994; Brians, 1997; Highton, 1997; Knack and White, 1998) can largely be attributed to the fact that it makes voting a one-step process (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). In those

states in which residents are allowed to register at the polling place at the day of the election registration (or in the case of North Dakota no registration is required) no longer differs from voting in place because the citizen registers where she votes. In these states registration no longer differs from voting in time because the citizen is allowed to register on the same day she votes. Finally, the act of registration in same day states still differs in kind (it remains a bureaucratic task), but it nonetheless is combined with the political act of voting, and an individual who drives to the polls with the intention of casting a ballot will most likely gladly fulfill the registration requirement.

While states with election-day registration have high levels of turnout when compared to other states (Fenster, 1994; Brians, 1997; Highton, 1997) there is still a socioeconomic skew to the active electorate. Highton (1997) found that the gap in the participation rates between those with the highest levels of educational attainment and those with the lowest in three pre-NVRA states with election day registration (Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin) and North Dakota (no registration system) was ten percentage points smaller than it was in the other forty-six states and the District of Columbia. However, the gap between the highest and lowest educational categories is still thirty-eight percentage points in these states. Therefore, the reduction in the costs of registration by making voting a one-step process and essentially eliminating two of the differences (place and time) and addressing the third (kind) by combining the acts of registration and voting, does reduce the socioeconomic skew in the active electorate, but only modestly. Those individuals with the skills, resources, and

attitudes conducive to participation still participate at rates far higher than those who do not possess these skills.

The NVRA attempts to make the act of registration easier by placing registration opportunities in front as many citizens as possible. The NVRA does not, however, address the fact that registration is a fundamentally different act. No matter how the potential voter registers under NVRA procedures (motor vehicle office, through the mail, or at a public agency such as an AFDC office) he or she must still register prior to the election, at a place which is in a different location than the polling place. In the post-NVRA period then, registration remains a bureaucratic requirement which must be fulfilled before an individual is allowed to participate in the political act of voting (Brians, 1998). Where the NVRA differs from the more traditional form of registration (elections office) is that the NVRA attempts to take the onus for registration off of the individual by placing the opportunity to register in more convenient locations.

In the pre-NVRA period, there appears to have been a self-selection, in that those individuals who were most capable and willing to overcome the bureaucratic hurdle to voting were those individuals most likely to vote in the first place. Those who possessed personal characteristics conducive to voting (education, age, income) and attitudes conducive to participation (efficacy, partisanship, and interest) (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Jackson, 1996; Timpone, 1998). These individuals voted because they were registered. They registered because they wanted to vote (Erikson, 1981). From this perspective then,

the individual who took the time and made the effort to overcome the obstacles of registration may have, indeed, been participating in a political act, or at the very least a politically directed act, rather than a simple bureaucratic task.

In the post-NVRA period, this self-selection of likely voters through the registration process may have been diminished. By placing registration opportunities in front of more citizens, the NVRA more than likely succeeded at making the registered electorate more representative of the entire voting age population. In other words, the increases in registration attributed to the NVRA, most likely resulted in a registered electorate which is slightly more poor, less educated, and of color. As mentioned, however, the reform did nothing to change the fact that registration under the NVRA, whether it be at a drivers license bureau, through the mail, or a public agency remains a bureaucratic act distinctly different and separate from the political act of casting a ballot. Those individuals registering under these procedures, who for whatever reason had abstained prior to the NVRA, and who possessed the resources and attitudes conducive to participation are likely to have participated in the election. However, for those individuals who registered under NVRA procedures yet did not possess the resources conducive to political participation, simply engaging in a bureaucratic activity is not likely to be seen as an "investment" (Erikson, 1981), but rather as just another requirement of interacting with a public agency. For these individuals, the legal barriers to registration may have been removed, but the personal barriers such as lower levels of education and the lack of attitudes crucial to

participation such as efficacy and interest still remain between the citizen and the voting booth.

It might be, however, an oversimplification to claim that individuals registering under NVRA procedures possess the same level of participatory resources. As discussed earlier, the reform include three provisions intended to influence levels of registration and thus turnout (motor vehicle, mail-in, and public agency). In fact, with the addition of the three NVRA provisions we now have six methods of registration on a national level: elections office, motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency, registration drives, and election day registration. Each of these methods of registration are essentially different acts which place different motivational requirements upon the individual. Thus, we might expect the type of individual registering by each of these methods to vary across based on the requirements of the act.

Elections office registration, as discussed, requires to the individual to overcome the obstacles of time, place, and kind. In other words, in order to register at an elections office, an individual has to travel to a specific location prior to the election in order to carry out a bureaucratic requirement. Thus, prior to the NVRA, individuals, who registered under this method tended to have higher levels of the skills, resources, and motivation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). In a sense, these individuals not only had the ability to overcome the obstacles to voting, but they had the desire to vote, and when the opportunity to vote came around these individuals took advantage of the opportunity

(Erikson, 1981). We might call registration with this intention a "politically directed act," because an individual who seeks out the opportunity to register does with the intention of participating in the political act of voting.

While mail-in registration may be much more convenient than traveling to the registration office, in that the citizen receives a card in the mail, and all he or she has to do is to return that card to the elections office to be placed on the registration rolls. To assume, however, that all individuals receiving voter registration applications in the mail will fill out the card and return it simply because it is convenient may be a less than a reasonable expectation. We might expect, therefore, that individuals registering through the mail to be similar to individuals registering at an elections office in terms of participatory resources. In other words, an individual taking the time to fill out a registration card and returning it is likely to have at least a modest level engagement with the political world, and thus more likely to possess higher levels of education and income. While the convenience of mail-in registration most likely produces higher levels of lower status registrants than elections office registration, we nonetheless can argue that registering through the mail is a politically directed act, in which the individual registers with the intention of voting.

Individuals registering at motor vehicle offices and public agencies, on the other hand, are registering to vote while undertaking bureaucratic activity. There is no necessary intention to vote involved when a visitor to a state office fills out registration application in response to prompting by the office staff. Thus, there is no necessary linkage between registration and voting when an individual registers at a

motor vehicle office or a public agency such as an AFDC office. Rather than an investment in the act of voting, registration may be simply a by-product of an encounter with a bureaucratic agency. From, this perspective then, the pool of new registrants produced by motor vehicle registration is most likely more heterogeneous in terms of participatory resources than either elections office or mail-in registration. In effect, the population of registered citizens produced by motor vehicle registration, while certainly including those of middle to upper status⁴, should consist of many more individuals of lower status than either elections office or mail-in registration.

As mentioned one can argue that mail-in registration produces similar probabilities of voting to elections office registration because motivational similarities of the individuals. In a sense they are both politically directed acts. Registrations drives on the other hand, may have produced such positive results in inducing potential voters into the voting booth because the act of asking someone to register during a registration drive is a political act in itself. Simply put, "group-aided registration (Cain and McCue, 1985) can be conceptualized as political mobilization, and thus while this form of registration produces a registered electorate skewed toward those who may not have not strong engagement with the political world or possess resources conducive to participation, there is linkage between the

⁴ Obviously, individuals registering at an AFDC office are not of higher socioeconomic status, and not likely to possess the resources and attitudes conducive to electoral participation. Thus the pool of new registrants produced by agency registration is likely to be homogeneous along socioeconomic lines, and less likely to vote than individuals who registered through the mail or at an elections office.

act of registration and voting, the effect may be the same as registering at an election office: casting a ballot.

From the above discussion, then, the most immediate impact of the implementation of the NVRA is the increase in the range of opportunities to register to vote. As discussed in the Chapter 1, NVRA proponents argued that placing registration opportunities in front of as many citizens as possible we should increase the proportion of citizens registered to vote and thus increase overall levels of turnout. Additionally, it was assumed that this increase in the overall number of registered citizens should increase the proportion of the politically marginalized (minorities, the poor, and young Americans) registered to vote, and thus increase the proportion of voters from these groups. The analysis in Part II will be an in-depth examination of the impact of the implementation of the NVRA on the individual level probability of registering to vote and the probability of voting once registered under these procedures.

Data and Methods

In order to explore the impact of the NVRA on individual level registration and voting I have chosen to use the 1996 *Current Population Survey: Voter Supplemental File*.⁵ The use of this data set has many advantages which will be

⁵ Ideally, one would use validated registration and voting data acquired from the states. Unfortunately, there are approximately 170,000 precincts in the United States (King, 1997) and thus the acquisition of data to gauge the impact on the law at the national level would be a herculean task to say the least. Furthermore, not all states keep records concerning the class, race, and age of registrants and voters thus the inconsistency of data across states also poses serious problems for any national level study. Obviously, a case study approach to these questions would be quite informative. If the researcher

discussed in detail below. However, the use of survey data such as *Current Population Survey* (CPS) suffers from the tendency of some individuals to misreport whether or not they voted. Unfortunately, misreporting is not evenly distributed across social groups, and thus error due to misreporting is systematic (Sigelman, 1982; Hill and Hurley, 1984; Silver, Anderson, and Abramson, 1986), and we should therefore always be very cognizant of the fact that some groups tend to over report more than others when we draw conclusions based on survey data.⁶

The advantages of using the CPS for analyzing the impact of the NVRA on registration and voting are twofold. First, the CPS has a very large national sample which allows for ample state level analysis as well as the disaggregation of the sample along social group lines, which is crucial to this project. Second, the 1996 CPS: Voter Supplemental File includes three questions⁷ which allow the researcher to identify whether or not the respondent registered after January 1, 1995 (deadline

could identify one state in which registration and voting records were kept in conjunction with class, race, and age data then a rather complete analysis with validated data could be conducted. This approach would be quite informative but the results would certainly be context sensitive. The decision made for this project is to conduct a national level study so that we may extrapolate the findings to the larger population of the United States.

⁶ Hill and Hurley (1984) and Silver et al. (1986) found that African Americans and those with higher levels of education tend to misreport the vote (said they voted but did not) more so than other groups. Anderson and Silver (1986) contend that the differences between whites and blacks has been overstated.

⁷ 1) Did you register to vote after January 1, 1995? 2) Did you register to vote when you obtained or renewed your driver's licence or did you register in some other way? 3) How did you register to vote? Questions 2 and 3 were only asked if the respondent answered yes to question one. See Appendix D for the full text of the questions and the response options.

for states to implement the NVRA), whether or not the respondent registered at a motor vehicle office, and if not at a motor vehicle bureau the place or method of registration (public agency, mail-in, election office, registration drive, school or hospital, or election day).⁸ These questions yielded 8366 individuals who reported to have registered after January 1, 1995 and thus they are considered to have registered in the NVRA period. Of this group of registrants 4158 reported registering under NVRA procedures (motor vehicle office, through the mail, or at a public agency such as an AFDC office). This subsample also produced 3814 individuals reporting to have registered through conventional means (election office; registration drive, and at a school or hospital)⁹ Finally, of the 8366 respondents, 285 individuals reported that they registered on election day and 109 reported registering through means not listed in the questionnaire.¹⁰

⁸ The use of these three questions are not only susceptible to misreporting just as with voting, but they also require the respondent to remember where they registered, which adds to measurement error (Knack, 1998). However, the opportunity provided by these questions to conduct an in-depth study (with a very large sample) of the impact of the NVRA on registration and voting across social groupings, outweighs the weaknesses of the data, given the paucity of alternative data sources for this type of analysis.

⁹ Registration through registration drives or at schools or hospitals are fundamentally different modes of registration than election office registration. Registration at an election office is a result of a host of individual level factors such as education, income, interest in politics etc. Registration drives on the other hand reflect mobilization efforts more so than individual motivation and resources. Because registration through drives and at institutions such as schools was available long before NVRA reforms these forms of registration are considered to be conventional for this analysis.

¹⁰ Respondents listing election day or other means of registration are excluded from the analysis. We know that an individual registering on the day of an election has an almost certain probability of voting, and thus any information gained from this is not overwhelmingly informative. This combined with the fact that six of the seven states with same day registration (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Wyoming, New Hampshire, Idaho,

Because of the question concerning whether or not the individual registered after January 1, 1995, I am able to identify those individuals who registered prior to the implementation of the NVRA (51,560 individuals). Unfortunately, there is no way to determine where these individuals registered; we only know that they reported registering. Because many states had various forms of facilitative registration systems (ranging from election day registration to active motor voter programs), it is likely that many of these individuals registered under NVRA type procedures. However, one can safely assume, given that there were more states which did not have facilitative systems prior to the NVRA than those that did (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Knack, 1995), a very large proportion (if not majority) of the pre-NVRA registrants registered under traditional methods such as an election office.

From this subsample then, we can conduct an in-depth analysis of registration and voting in the 1996 election. Using the logic of electoral participation as a two process, the analysis in Part II will examine the acts of registration and voting as separate. Chapter 6 will focus on the act of registration. I will explore if there are any substantive differences (in terms of social characteristics) in the type of individual registering under NVRA procedures and individuals registering under more conventional means and those registering prior to the NVRA. In Chapter 7, I

and North Dakota) were exempt from NVRA procedures and thus a respondent in one of these states could not register under NVRA procedures led to the decision to exclude these respondents from the analysis. Maine was not exempt from NVRA procedures because election day registration is not statewide. Respondents listing other as a means of registration were excluded because we really don't know where these individuals registered.

examine the probability of voting once an individual has registered. The analysis will explore the probability of voting across registration method and social characteristics.

The Model

Socio-Economic Variables: Registration and voting are highly dependent upon the socioeconomic status and the social characteristics of the individual. Thus, the probability of registration and voting increases as the age, income, education, and length of residence of the individual increases. Additionally, certain groups within the population have a very low probability of registration and voting and thus they are target groups of the NVRA. The inclusion of variables such as age, income, education, length of residence, race, and gender allows for the examination of the differences across these social groups to determine whether or not the reform had any effect on the registration and voting rates of low participation groups.

Registration Variables: As discussed, one of the questions of interest in this project is whether or not there were any differences in the probability of voting across methods of registration. Thus, the model includes dummy variables to capture the type of registration method the respondent reported using (motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency, elections office, and registration drive). The model for those registering after January 1, 1995 will include dummy variables for motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency, and registration drive registration. The model for pre-NVRA registrants does not include variables for registration type because respondents were not asked how they registered if they reported registering after January 1, 1995.

Registration Laws: Because many states had NVRA type reforms in place prior to the new law it is important to examine whether or not the implementation of the law in those states without the reforms in place had an impact on the probability of registration when compared to those states with already facilitative registration systems. The models for registration will include dummy variables capturing the varying levels of reform prior the NVRA. States are classified as having a passive motor voter program or none, or active (1,0), a passive motor voter program or no or active program (1,0), mail-in registration or none (1,0), agency registration or none (1,0), and delayed implementation of the NVRA or no delay (1,0). Because closing the registration rolls a lengthy period of time prior to the election can prevent potential voters from being induced into the voting booth by the politicized nature of the campaign (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Jackson, 1996) it is important to consider the depressive effect of lengthy closing dates. Because the voting analysis is an for those registered to vote, these registration law variables are excluded from the voting models because they are assumed to have the greatest impact on the probability of registration not on the probability of voting once registered.

Mobilization Variables: For any analysis on the probability of voting it is important that we consider the impact of campaign season upon the individual respondent's probability of voting. Unfortunately, the CPS data do not allow us to measure the impact of direct contact by the parties on the probability of voting; therefore this analysis uses state level aggregate measures to capture the mobilization potential of the campaign. While the campaign itself can induce individuals into registering to

vote in order to vote, the question as to whether or not an individual registered to vote after January 1, 1995, only tells us the individual reported to have registered after this time. We have no way of knowing whether the individual registered in 1995, when the mobilization forces of the campaign would not have been present, or in 1996 when the campaign (also the parties and other political organizations) certainly could have mobilized individuals into registering in order to vote. Because of this, these variables are excluded from the registration models.

Presidential Margin: We would expect the heightened public interest and mobilization efforts of the parties and candidates in a presidential contest to increase the probability of a registered voter actually voting (Jackson, 1996). This effect should be accentuated in a state in which the presidential race is particularly competitive. The variable for this analysis is coded as the actual margin of victory in the 1996 presidential election in the respondent's state of residence.

State Races: Senate and Gubernatorial elections create more public interest for the campaign within a state, particularly if the races are competitive (Cox and Munger, 1989). Therefore, the presence of at least one state race (Senate or Gubernatorial) should have a positive impact on the probability of a registered citizen voting in an election. For this analysis, the variable is coded as the number of statewide races (0-3) within a respondent's state of residence.

Party Competition: One could expect states with a high level of party competition to exhibit higher turnout levels than those with relatively little party competition (Cox and Munger, 1989). Thus it is important to consider partisan competition at the state

level when considering changes when examining the probability of individual level voting. This variable is measured as the actual deviation from 50% of party control in the state House of Representatives. Thus, a state with each party controlling 50% (coded as zero) of the House would be categorized as perfectly competitive, and a state with total one party control would be coded as 50 (Luttbeg, 1992).

Campaign Spending: As campaign spending within a state increases we expect to see increases in the overall level of turnout, due to the mobilization efforts resulting from the spending. Consequently, we would expect the probability of an individual voting to increase as campaign spending increases (Cox and Munger, 1989). The model therefore includes a variable measuring the level of Senate and House spending within a state in 1996.¹¹

Region: Registration and voting rates not only vary across states, but also across regions. Because of its history of exclusive registration practices, the South has traditionally had lower levels of turnout and registration. Additionally, it is important to determine if the NVRA did have an impact was the impact uniform across regions or did the reform tend to work in one area of the country and not others. For this analysis the respondent's region will be broken down as (South, Northeast, Midwest, and West).

¹¹ The relationship between spending and turnout is not linear. The impact of spending on turnout as the level moves from \$0 to \$100,000 is far greater than if the spending level in state moves from \$1,000,000 to \$1,100,000. Therefore, spending variables must be transformed by taking the log of the actual number of dollars.

Part II of this project, then, attempts to answer two questions. First, In Chapter 6 I will ask what is the probability that an individual with certain demographic categories (for example, socioeconomic status) would register under a given method of registration. In order to do this I will regress the probability of registration (coding above) on personal characteristics (educational attainment, family income, length of residence, marital status, sex, and race), dummy variables for NVRA type reforms prior to the reform, the closing date of the state, a dummy variable for those states which delayed implementation and finally dummy variables for region.

Chapter 7 will ask what is the probability that an individual with a given demographic characteristic would vote once registered under a given registration method. In order to explore this question I regress the dependent variable (vote or no vote) on personal characteristics (same as above); dummy variables for method of registration (elections office, registration drive, mail-in, public agency, motor vehicle), margin of victory in the 1996 presidential election in the respondent's state, the level of party competition in the state house in the respondent's, the number of statewide races in the respondent's state of residence, and the log of the total spending in the state, and finally dummy variables for region. The use of these two models provides for a rich an in-depth examination of the registration and voting patterns associated with the NVRA in 1996.

CHAPTER 6

THE IMPACT OF THE NVRA ON THE PROBABILITY OF REGISTRATION

As discussed earlier, prior to the NVRA the registration requirement acted as a filter through which those willing and able to overcome the barriers of place, time, and kind had the greatest likelihood of placing their names on the registration rolls. The registered electorate, therefore, tended to be skewed toward those individuals possessing the attitudes and resources conducive to political participation. The registered tended to be comprised of individuals with higher levels of education and income, those who had lived at their current address for relatively longer periods of time, older citizens, individuals who belonged to secondary associations, and those individuals with attitudes conducive to participation such as partisan identification, political efficacy, and trust in government (Mitchell and Wlezien, 1995; Jackson, 1996; Timpone, 1998). In other words the registered electorate prior to the NVRA was skewed toward those individuals most willing and able to overcome the obstacle of voluntary registration.

Part I one of this project was based on the fact that prior to the NVRA many states had varying levels of NVRA type reforms in place. The registered electorate, therefore, is not completely a product of voluntary registration. As of 1992 at least twenty-four states had motor voter programs in place (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995; Knack, 1995). Additionally, twenty-eight states also had some form of mail-in

programs, and nine states had at least minimal agency programs (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995 and Knack, 1995). Thus, the system of registration laws across states was anything but monolithic, indeed there was great variation.

The NVRA attempts to standardize registration laws across all fifty states and the District of Columbia¹ with the intention creating facilitative registration systems in all states. Thus, following the implementation of the NVRA citizens in every state should have the opportunity to place their name on the registration rolls because of the wide range of registration opportunities available. The question then, is whether or not the creation of a more uniform system of facilitative registration systems will substantively change the social composition of the registered electorate? In other words, it is important that we determine whether or not the relaxation of registration laws on a national level produced a registered composed of more young people, more individuals of lower socio-economic status, and racial minorities. Furthermore, in the post-NVRA era we now have six methods of registration available to citizens: motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency, elections office, registration drive, and election day. Because of the differing motivational requirements of each form of registration we might expect that each form of registration would produce different registered populations in terms of social characteristics. One of the central aims of this chapter is to explore whether or not the distribution of registration across social groups differed by method of registration.

¹ Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Idaho, Wyoming were excluded from this standardization of registration due to their use of election day registration and in the case of North Dakota no registration system.

Data and Methods

The objective in this chapter is to examine the probability of an individual registering under one of the five methods of registration available: motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency, elections office, registration drive. By exploring this across the social characteristics of education, income, gender, age, race, and length of residence I should be able to identify patterns of social group registration, such as whether or not a particular method of registration tended to register individuals from particular social groups. If the logic of the reform is correct, we would expect the convenience of motor vehicle, mail-in, and public agency registration to reduce the tendency of upper status individuals, older Americans and whites, to register at greater rates than low participation groups such as lower socioeconomic status individuals, the young, racial minorities.

As mentioned in the introduction to Part II, the 1996 CPS: Voter Supplemental file asks a series of questions regarding the timing and location of a respondent's registration which provides the unique ability of identifying those individuals who registered following the implementation deadline of January 1, 1995. Thus, we can separate the sample into those who registered prior to the implementation of the NVRA and those who registered during the NVRA period (or at least the first two years, 1995-1996). Using this series of questions I can also determine the method of registration used by a newly registered respondent,² and by

² Respondents reporting to have registered at a school, hospital or "other" are excluded from this analysis.

examining the probability that an individual would register under a particular method I can gain insight to the type of individual registering under each method. For instance, I can determine whether particular registration method, such as motor vehicle registration, was successful at registering larger numbers of lower status individuals than election office registration.

This analysis proceeds from a fairly simple logic. As of January 1, 1995 (NVRA implementation deadline) there were two types of citizens in the United States in terms of registration status: registered citizens and unregistered citizens. I assume that those most likely to be effected by the NVRA are those individuals who were not registered as of January 1, 1995.³ In other words, those most likely to register during this period are those individuals who were not registered prior to January 1, 1995. One of the major drawbacks of using this dataset is that we have no way of knowing whether or not an individual registering under NVRA procedures would have registered on their own, and registered under NVRA procedures simply because of the convenience. We do know, however, that many citizens upon turning eighteen register, particularly during an election year, and thus this is one group of individuals we can control for. In effort to account for those individuals registering

³ As Wolfinger and his colleagues have reminded us, relaxed registration procedures are likely to have the greatest effects on those individuals who have recently moved and need to re-register by virtue of their new place of resident. Obviously, many of the individuals reporting to have registered after January 1, 1995 were previously registered citizens, who may have taken advantage of NVRA procedures to update their registration. The data used in this analysis provide no way of identifying whether or not an individual was re-registering or registering for the first time. Although, some of the re-registering should be captured by the length of residence variable included in the model.

upon turning eighteen, I have included in the sample only those individuals who were twenty years old and older as of January 1, 1995; thereby, creating a sample of respondents who had at least one chance to register “voluntarily” prior to the implementation of the NVRA. (24,537 respondents) Using this subsample then we can ask what is the probability that an unregistered individual in the post NVRA would register under a particular method of registration.

In order to do this I estimated five logistic regression models: one for each method of registration. The dependent in each model was coded 1 if the respondent reported to have registered by the given method, and 0 registered under one of the other five methods of registration or did not register at all. For instance, for the model estimating the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office, the dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent reported to have registered at a motor vehicle office, and 0 if the respondent reported to have registered at either through the mail, at a public agency, at an elections office, through a registration drive, or the respondent did not register at all. For each model the dependent variable is regressed on the respondent’s age, education, income, length of residence, marital status, gender, dummy variables to capture the respondent’s state of residence prior implementation of motor vehicle, mail-in, and public agency registration, a dummy variable for those states which delayed implementation of the NVRA, a variable for the length of the closing date in the respondent’s state of residence, and dummy variables for the region of the respondent’s state of residence (south, Northeast, Midwest, west).

Additionally, a logistic model was estimated for those individuals reporting have registered prior to the implementation of the NVRA. Because of the nature of the question we have no way of knowing where these individuals registered to vote, so the dependent in this model is coded 1 if the respondent reported to be registered to vote, and 0 if not. The model is the same as above, although it does not include the delayed implementation variable because the delaying of implementation of the NVRA could have no effect on the probability of an individual registering prior to the NVRA. The sample used in the pre-NVRA model is composed 84,533 individuals.

By estimating these six models I can examine the probability of individuals from particular groups registering under given procedures. Particularly we can determine if the NVRA procedures were more successful at registering individuals from disadvantaged groups (those of lower socioeconomic status, the young, and racial minorities) than the other methods considered here (elections office, registration, and election day). The pre-NVRA model serves as a baseline for comparison with the other models. It in effect it represents the pre-NVRA registered electorate, which the reform was intended to transform.

Results

Table 5-1⁴ presents the relative probability that an individual registered under one of the five methods used in the analysis versus registering under another

⁴ The probabilities used in this analysis were converted from logistic regression coefficients found in the in Table 2.

procedure or not registering at all. Each cell in the table represents the difference in the probability of registration for an individual from a particular category and an individual from the excluded category.

As discussed above the group of individuals registering after January 1, 1995 (NVRA, Elections Office, and Registration Drive) are substantially younger than the group of individuals claiming to have registered prior to the NVRA. The mean age for post January 1, 1995 group is 37 years old, while the mean age for pre-NVRA registrants is 49 years old. The reasons for the age differences are two-fold. First, we would expect new registrants, as a group, to be younger because young people are much less likely to be registered than older citizens. Second, the group of individuals reporting to have registered prior to the NVRA includes individuals who registered many years prior to the implementation of the law. Thus, the mean age of each group is substantially different. Because social characteristics such as education, income, and length of residence are so strongly related to age, I decided to calculate the probability of registration for each method for two age groups. The younger age group (20-44) is represented as the midpoint of that range, or 32 years old. The older group (45-90) is represented as the midpoint of that range or 67 years old.

Socioeconomic Status

The first social category to be examined is educational attainment. When we examine the relative probability of registering under motor vehicle procedures across educational categories we can see that contrary to the expectations of many supporters of the NVRA, there is a strong and positive relationship between

Table 6-1

The Relative Probability of Registering by a Particular Method Across Social Characteristics

	Motor Vehicle		Mailin		PubAg		Electoff		Regdrive		Pre-NVRA	
	Age1	Age2	Age1	Age2	Age1	Age2	Age1	Age2	Age1	Age2	Age1	Age2
<High School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
High School	8	7	1	2	0	0	3	3	0	0	14	15
Some College	13	12	5	7	*	*	7	8	2	4	28	25
College Degree	20	18	8	11	*	*	9	11	3	3	34	29
Advanced Degree	22	21	9	12	*	*	13	16	4	3	41	33
<\$10,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
\$10,000-\$19,999	2	1	-1	-1	-2	-1	3	3	0	0	4	2
\$20,000-\$39,999	5	5	1	2	*	*	4	4	0	0	7	4
\$40,000-\$74,999	8	7	3	4	*	*	4	5	0	0	12	7
\$75,000 and Above	11	10	6	9	*	*	5	6	1	0	15	9
Residence (<1yr)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Residence (1-2yrs)	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	2	1	1	8	5
Residence (3-5yrs)	-8	-9	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	23	12
Residence (5+ yrs)	-9	-10	-2	-2	-1	0	3	3	0	0	33	18
South	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northeast	-1	-2	3	4	1	0	3	4	-1	0	2	1
Midwest	7	6	0	-1	1	0	0	1	2	2	0	0
West	1	0	5	6	0	0	-4	-4	4	4	-2	-1
White	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Black	-2	-2	0	0	1	1	-1	-1	5	4	9	6
Hispanic	-3	-4	2	3	2	1	-1	-1	7	2	-3	-2
Male	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	2

Source: 1996 Current Population Survey

Note: The entries are the difference in the probability of registration by a given method between an individual with the indicated characteristic and an individual from the excluded category. The Age 1 category represents individuals between the ages of 18 and 44 (measured as the midpoint of 32 years of age). The Age 2 group represents those individuals between the ages of 45 and 90 (measured as the midpoint of 67 years of age).

educational attainment and registering at a motor vehicle office. Simply put, the higher the educational attainment of the individual the more likely he or she was to register at a motor vehicle office. In fact, for both age groups the difference in the probability of registering through this method for an individual with a college degree or higher is about 20 points greater than an individual with less than a high school diploma. Thus, in terms of registering citizens, motor vehicle office registration appears to have produced a registered population slightly more skewed toward those of higher levels of education.

When we move to the probability of registering through the mail, one can see that the convenience of allowing registration through the mail appears to have produced a registered population more evenly distributed across educational categories than motor vehicle office registration. The relationship between education and registration is still present (those with higher levels of education were more likely to register through the mail than those with lower levels of education) although substantially weaker than it is for motor vehicle registration. For instance, an individual from the younger age group with a college degree or higher had over an eight point greater probability of registering through the mail than an individual without a high school diploma. Interestingly, the opportunity to register through the mail appears to have had a greater on the relationship between education and registration for the younger age group than the older age group. Among older citizens the difference in the probability of registering through the mail for an individual with a college degree or higher and an individual with less than a high school diploma is

over eleven points, which is three points lower than for the younger group. While mail-in registration tended to attract those of higher educational status, the gap between those of higher status and lower status is much smaller than it is for motor vehicle registration.

The relationship between education and the probability of registering at an elections office is positive and significant as one would expect. Interestingly, however, the relationship is not as strong as it is among motor vehicle registration. The difference in the probability of registering at an elections office for those with a college degree and those with less than a high school diploma is over nine points for the younger group and eleven points for the older group. This gap is substantially smaller than it is for motor vehicle registration. In fact, the probability of elections office registration is much more evenly distributed across educational categories than motor vehicle registration.

When we compare elections office registration to mail-in registration we can see that the difference in the probability of registration for those with higher levels of education and those with lower levels is greater for elections office registration than it is for mail-in registration. When we examine the two methods across all educational categories we can see the differences between specific categories and those with less than a high school diploma are practically identical for both methods of registration until we compare the difference in the probability of registration for those with an advanced degree and those with less than a high school diploma. For both age groups the difference between these two educational categories is four

points greater for elections office registration than it is for mail-in registration. The voluntary nature of elections office registration apparently accentuates the difference in the probability of registering between those of the highest levels of education and those with the lowest, when compared to mail-in registration.

The relationship between educational attainment and registration drive registration is quite weak. For both age groups, as the education level increases probability of registering through a registration drive increases only modestly. In fact, the difference between in the probability of registration for an individual with the highest level of education and an individual with less than a high school education is only four points for the young group and three points for the older group. Thus, "group-aided" registration which is usually targeted toward specific groups such as the poor and minorities (Cain and McCue, 1985) produced the most equal registered population in terms of educational attainment.

Finally, a brief examination of pre-NVRA registration illustrates the tendency of the "normal" registered electorate to be skewed toward those of upper status. As the educational attainment of the individual increases the probability of registration among this group increases dramatically for both age groups. When we compare this group to the post-NVRA registrants we can see that the educational distribution of the populations produced by the other forms of registration considered here were much more balanced than the pre-NVRA group. Interestingly, the registered population produced by elections office registration is much more evenly distributed across educational across both age groups than the pre-NVRA group. One would

expect because of the voluntary nature of elections office registration, that educational attainment would be as strongly related to registration as it is among pre-NVRA registrants. These data provide no clues to explain this difference, but one can speculate that many of the elections office registrants may have registered during the election season of 1996 in response to the politicized nature of the campaign season, while many of the pre-NVRA group assumably registered during non-campaign years.

The patterns found among income categories are very similar to those for education. Just as with education there is significant and positive relationship between income level and the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office. Although, there is no significant difference in the probability of registering at one of these locations between the lowest two income groups, there is still over a ten point gap between those with the highest levels of income and those in the lowest income category. As with education, the results of this analysis suggest, contrary to the expectations of many supporters, that the higher the income level of the respondent the greater the likelihood an individual would register at a motor vehicle office.

When we examine the probability of registering through the mail across income categories, as with educational attainment, mail-in registration produced a more balanced registered population than motor vehicle registration. In fact, there is no significant difference in the probability of registering through the mail between the first three income categories. Thus, it appears mail-in registration was successful at closing the gap between those of the lowest levels of income, and those of at least

middle income. The difference the probability of registering through the mail between an individual with an income between \$40,000 and \$74,999 and an individual reporting an income of less than \$10,000 is only three points for the young age group and four points for the older group. The gaps between those reporting a family income over \$75,000 and those with those lowest income level is six points for the young group and nine points for older group. Once again, the higher the income level of the respondent the more likely he or she is to register to vote. Interestingly, when we compare motor vehicle and mail-in registration across income categories the registered populations are much more similar in composition.

The registered population across income categories produced by elections office registration more evenly distributed than motor vehicle. For both age groups the difference in the probability of registering at an elections office between a person making over \$40,000 is at most four points higher than a person making \$10,000 while for motor vehicle the gap is at least eight points. Once again, the convenience of motor vehicle registration produced at registered population more skewed toward those of higher socioeconomic status than voluntary registration at an elections office.

When we compare elections office registration and mail-in registrations the differences, while present, are not as clear as the differences between elections office and motor vehicle registration. Although the gap between those making \$20,000 and \$74,999 and those making less than \$10,000 is fairly modest (only four points), the difference is significant and larger than for mail-in registration. Thus, it appears that

mail-in registration did a slightly better job of reducing the gap between the middle categories than elections office registration. However, the gap between those with the highest level of family income and those with the lowest is smaller for elections office registration (five and six points) than for mail-in (six and nine points).

When we control for education, and other factors, the level of income has no impact on the probability of registering through a registration drive. There is no difference in the probability of registering through a drive across income categories. Once again, the tendency of groups conducting drives to focus their activities on specific groups such as racial minorities produces the most evenly distributed registered population in terms of income of all forms of registration considered here.

Finally, when we examine the probability of registration prior the NVRA, the greater the income level of the respondent the greater the likelihood of registration. As with educational categories the pattern of registration is more skewed toward those of upper status than the other forms of registration. Furthermore, the effect of income is more accentuated among the younger age group than it is among the older suggesting that as one ages the impact of socioeconomic factors such as income and education (this pattern is found among education categories also) diminishes.

The analysis of the probability of registration across education and income produced some very interesting results. As discussed earlier, the NVRA attempts to affect the registered electorate by placing registration opportunities in front of as many people as possible. Many supporters of the reform believed that by making registration as easy as possible more individuals of lower socioeconomic status could

be included in the registered electorate. And there was a fairly strong body of literature to suggest that reducing registration barriers should produce a more balanced registered electorate in terms of socioeconomic status. And indeed both forms of registration appear to have produced registered populations more evenly balanced across education and income categories than the pre-NVRA registered electorate. However, based on the results presented here, the individuals registering at a motor vehicle office or through the mail tended to have higher levels of education and income. It does appear that mail-in registration does produce a population slightly more inclusive in terms of education and income than motor vehicle registration.

The analysis presented omitted discussion of the public agency registration across education and income categories due to the small numbers of individuals from middle and upper levels of these groupings reporting to have registered at a public agency. Obviously, we would expect individuals registering at an AFDC or unemployment office to be of at least lower income status, and most likely of lower educational attainment also. Therefore, we would expect public agency registration to produce a registered population skewed toward those of lower socioeconomic status, and thus a success in terms of creating a more inclusive registered electorate. The number of individuals in this sample reporting to have registered at public agency is quite small. Out of 8366 hundred respondents reporting to have registered after January 1, 1995 four percent reported to have registered at a public agency. Compare this to the thirty-three percent who registered at a motor vehicle office or

the twenty-one percent who registered through the mail. Thus, the provision of the reform which is guaranteed to contribute to a more inclusive registered electorate produces such small numbers of registrants compared to the other two provisions that the effect on the overall registered electorate is likely to be very small, even in the long run.

The most interesting aspect of this analysis thus far, has been the findings concerning the probability of registering through a registration drive. When compared to other forms of registration considered here, registration drives tended to produce a registered population much more evenly balanced across education and income categories. While, I will refer to registration drives throughout the remainder of this analysis, this is a good point to note that in terms of creating a more equitable registered electorate targeted registration efforts to appear to be much more successful than voluntary or NVRA registration reforms.

Length of Residence

Much of the literature on the impact of registration requirements on electoral participation suggested that the requirement of having to register had a substantial impact on those individuals who were residentially mobile. The requirement of having to register after changing residences was a burden that many individuals felt was too difficult to overcome, or not worth the effort. Creating a more convenient registration system, therefore, would have the greatest impact on those who had recently changed addresses (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass, 1987; Mitchell and Wlezien, 1995).

The data presented in Table 6-1 suggest that the literature concerning the impact of relaxing registration barriers on the residentially mobile was accurate. When we examine the probability of registering prior to the implementation of the NVRA one can clearly see that longer an individual has lived in his or her current address the greater the probability the greater the likelihood that individual was to register to vote. For the younger group an individual who reported living in his or her current address for more than five years had a thirty-three point higher probability of registering than an individual living at his or her current address less than a year. For the older age group the gap is only 18 points, suggesting that the impact of length of residence diminishes as one ages; however, the difference between those with relative residential stability and those who recently moved is still quite large.

Looking at motor vehicle registration, one can clearly see, controlling for socioeconomic status, that the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office is much greater for individuals who lived at their current address at relatively short period of time. There is no significant difference in the probability of registering between an individual reporting to have lived at his or her current address between one and two years and an individual reporting to have lived at his or her current address less than one year. However, for both age groups the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office for those individuals living at their current address more than three years is over eight points lower than those living at their current address less than a year. Clearly, motor vehicle registration had the greatest effect on those individuals recently changing their place of residence.

The relationship between mail-in registration and length of residence is much weaker than for motor vehicle registration. There is no significant difference in the probability of registering through the mail between the first three groups (less than five years). Those individuals living at their current address more than five years had a two point lower probability of registration than an individual living at their current address less than a year (for both age groups). While this does suggest a greater impact on those of lower residential stability, the differences are quite small, and one can safely conclude that the probability of mail-in registration is not substantively influenced by length of residence.

The pattern for public agency registration is very similar to mail-in. There is no significant relationship between the length of time an individual has lived at his or her current address the likelihood of registering at a public agency. While we might expect the average client of an AFDC office to have residential instability, that is may not always be the case. Many AFDC recipients live in state subsidized housing and thus may stay at the same location for several years. Furthermore, the question concerning public agency registration allowed the respondent to report registering at unemployment offices and disability offices in addition to AFDC offices, and there is no necessary linkage between unemployment or disability and length of residence. The findings for the probability of registration at a public agency across length of residence categories are not surprising.

While the differences in the gaps between those of longer tenure at their current address and those with shorter length of residence are substantially smaller

for elections office registration than for the pre-NVRA registration, the pattern is still similar. Those who have lived at their current address for more than a year have a significantly higher probability of registering at an elections office than those individuals living at their current location for less than a year. When we compare this to the motor vehicle registration it is clear that the voluntary nature of elections office registration tends to skew the elections office registered population toward those with relative residential stability while motor vehicle registration tends to skew the population toward those who have recently moved.

As one might expect, there is no significant relationship between length of residence and the probability of being asked to register during a registration drive. As discussed, registration drives tend to target specific groups such as the poor, the young, and racial minorities. And, indeed, an individual from one of these three groups is likely to be relatively unstable in terms of the length of time they spend at one address. However, when we control for these factors, there is no significant relationship between registration drives and length of residence. The group-aided nature of registration drives appears to offset the effects of length of residence on the probability of registration.

The analysis concerning the probability of registration across length of residence suggests that motor vehicle registration might be successful at creating a more balanced registered electorate in terms of length of residence. Clearly, those individuals who reported living at their current address for two years or less had a higher probability of registering at a motor vehicle office than those individuals

living at their current address more than three years. This effect was much stronger than it was for mail-in registration. It is very likely that the success of motor vehicle registration in terms of registering recent movers is due to its intended goal. Some believed that motor vehicle registration would have an impact on recent movers because these individuals would visit the motor vehicle office to change the address on their license or to acquire a new license if moving to a new state. Once there the individual then would be registered to vote (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). While these data provide no information to confirm this assumption, the patterns presented here are certainly consistent with the logic of the argument.

Race

The results presented in Table 6-1 suggest that the NVRA produced mixed results in moving racial minorities into the registered electorate. When controlling for socioeconomic status, African-Americans had a significantly higher probability of registering prior to the NVRA than whites. However, for both age groups there is no significant difference in the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office or through the mail. In fact, there is no difference in the probability of registering at an elections office following the implementation of the NVRA between African-Americans and whites. While, the coefficients for the differences between African-Americans and whites are not significant in the logistic models, the negative signs for the differences in the probability of voting for motor vehicle and mail-in registration are negative, suggesting that whites may have had a higher probability of registering under these two methods than African-Americans.

African-Americans did have a significantly, although modestly, higher probability of registering at a public agency than whites when we control for socioeconomic status. While this finding is a reflection of the concentration of African-Americans as clients of state-aid agencies it certainly suggests that in terms of moving African-Americans into the registered electorate public agency registration was more successful than either motor vehicle or mail-in registration.

Registration drives were also successful at moving African-Americans into the registered electorate. For both age groups African-Americans had a significantly higher probability of registering through a registration drive than whites (five points for the younger group and four points for the older group). As mentioned, registration drives tend to target racial minorities and the "group-aided" (Cain and McCue, 1985) nature of this form of registration suggests that in terms of bringing African-Americans into the registered electorate reaching out and asking them to register will produce positive results.

Hispanics start from a disadvantaged position relative to whites in terms of the probability of registration. When we control for socioeconomic status, Hispanics had a significantly lower probability of registering prior to the NVRA. Motor vehicle registering did nothing to alleviate this difference. For both age groups, Hispanics had a significantly lower probability of registering at a motor vehicle office than whites. This pattern is somewhat accentuated among older respondents. For pre-NVRA registrants the difference between older whites and Hispanics was two points. For motor vehicle registration this difference is four points suggesting that older

Hispanics were particularly disadvantaged in terms of registering at a motor vehicle office.

Mail-in registration was particularly successful at registering Hispanics. When we control for socioeconomic status, Hispanics of both age groups had a significantly higher probability of registering through the mail than whites. Older Hispanics were slightly more advantaged than younger Hispanics in that the gap between older Hispanics and older whites is one-point greater than it for younger Hispanics and whites. I should note that this trend may not be attributable to the implementation of the NVRA four of the states with the highest proportion of Hispanic citizens (Arizona, California, New York, and Texas) all had "easy" mail-in programs (Highton and Wolfinger, 1995) prior to the implementation of the federal law. Therefore, this pattern could be a reflection of well established mail-in programs in these states. The findings do suggest, that for whatever reason, the convenience of mail-registration is more successful at registering Hispanics than whites.

Public agency registration was also successful at registering Hispanics. For both age groups Hispanics had a significant, although modestly, higher probability of registering at a public agency than whites. As with African-Americans this is most likely to the high concentration on Hispanics as clients of state-aid agencies. Registration drives were particularly successful at bringing Hispanics into the registered electorate. Hispanics of both age groups had a significant two-point higher probability of registering through a registration drive than whites.

The data presented here concerning race and the probability of registration highlight the need to examine registration across the different modes of registration, as well as across social categories. Motor vehicle registration, the central method of registration provided by the NVRA, was not particularly successful at bringing racial minorities into the registered electorate. When controlling for socioeconomic status, whites appear to have had a higher probability of registering at a motor vehicle office than both African-Americans and Hispanics. Mail-in registration, on the other hand, appears to have resulted in the inclusion of Hispanics into the registered electorate relative to whites. As one would expect, public agency registration was particularly successful at registering African-Americans and Hispanics. Although the success of this form of registration is due to the unfortunate concentration of African-Americans and Hispanics as clients of state welfare agencies, the results presented do suggest that public agency registration was successful at bringing racial minorities into the registered electorate. Finally, registration drives were especially successful at registering racial minorities. The success of drives is due to the targeted nature of registration drives. Groups such as Operation Push and the Southwestern Voter Registration Education League target African-Americans and Hispanics specifically and thus contribute to creating a more inclusive registered electorate in terms of racial minorities.

Age

One of the principal target groups of the NVRA was young Americans. While this analysis uses age as a control it is important to consider the effect of the NVRA

across age categories in isolation from other factors such as socioeconomic status and race. Table 6-2 presents the relative probability of registration across age groups. Using pre-NVRA registration as a baseline, one can see that the older the respondent the more likely he or she was to register to vote within the sample. The data presented in Table 6-2 suggest that the NVRA was modestly successful in bringing young citizens into the registered electorate.

Younger citizens had a modestly higher probability of registering at a motor vehicle office than older citizens. Although this relationship is not significant in the logistic model it does suggest that motor vehicle registration was successful at registering young citizens. For instance individuals forty-five and older had a two-point probability of registering at a motor vehicle office than an individual under the age of thirty. Motor vehicle may be especially suited to registering young citizens. They are more likely to be movers than older Americans. Many young citizens purchase new automobiles around the time they reach voting age, or possibly acquire their first license. Finally, there is the possibility that many younger citizens sought out registration opportunities and chose motor vehicle registration because the publicity surrounding the law.

There is a significant and positive relationship between mail-in registration and age. The data in Table 6-2 suggest that older Americans took advantage of the convenience of mail-in registration. Respondents from the oldest age group (65 years and above) had a five point higher probability of registering through the mail than a respondent between the ages of 20 and 29. Interestingly there is no substantive

Table 6-2
The Relative Probability of Registration Across Age Categories

	Motor Vehicle	Mailin	PubAg	ElectOff	RegDrive	Pre-NVRA
20-29	—	—	—	—	—	—
30-44	-1	0	0	-1	-1	6
45-64	-2	1	-1	0	-1	11
65 and Above	-2	5	-1	5	-2	15

Source: 1996 Current Population Survey

Note: The entries are the difference in the probability of registration by a given method between an individual of the indicated age group and individual from the youngest age group. They represent the probability of voting for a white woman of average age, with average levels of education, income, length of residence, from a state with average levels of presidential competitiveness, party competition, and campaign spending, in the South.

difference in the probability of registering through the mail for respondents of the 30-44 and 45-64 age groups and respondents from the youngest age group. Clearly the ability to register to vote from the comfort of one's own home is well suited to older citizens who may not have the ability or need to travel to a location such as a motor vehicle office to register to vote.

There is no significant relationship between public agency registration and the age of the respondent. The data in Table 6-2 do suggest, however, that younger citizens had a very modestly higher probability of registering at a public agency than older citizens. While many of the clients of state agencies such as AFDC offices are younger, the average client of an unemployment or disability is likely to be older thus the data presented here, because the inclusion of these different types of registration under the classification public agency, may obscure any true relationships that exist.

The pattern of registration found for elections office registration is very similar to mail-in. There are no real substantive differences in the probability of registering at an elections office for first three age groups. However, respondents from the oldest age group had a five-point advantage in the probability of registering at an elections office than respondents from the youngest age group. Clearly, older citizens seeking the opportunity to register are likely to know that the traditional location of registration is the elections office and they are therefore more likely to travel (if possible) to the elections office in order to register. While the relationship between the probability of registering through a registration drive is not significant, the data in Table 6-2 suggest that younger respondents had a slightly higher probability of being registered by a registration drive than older respondents.

Gender

The information in Table 6-1 suggests that women have a somewhat higher probability of registering to vote than men. Among the pre-NVRA sample, women of both age groups had a significantly higher probability of registering prior to the NVRA than men. Women also have a higher probability of registering at a motor vehicle office than men. This advantage is modestly accentuated among older women than for younger women. Mail-in registration also produced a registered population composed of more women than men. For both age groups women had a two-point higher probability of registering through the mail. As expected, women had a higher probability of registering at a public agency than men. The numbers presented in Table 1 obscure the real difference between men and women in the

probability of registering at one of these locations. Because the dependent variable is coded one for registration at a public agency and 0 for registration by one of the other four methods or no registration at all, I am asking what is the probability that an individual out of the sample of non-registered citizens as of January 1, 1995 (24,537) would register at a public agency. Only four percent registered at an office such as an AFDC office and thus the probability of registering at a public agency is very low. Nonetheless, women had a substantially higher probability of registering at a public agency than men, because they are the greatest share of state-aid office clients.

Interestingly, there is no difference in probability of registering at an elections office between men and women. Because women are advantaged in the other forms of registration it appears that elections office registration may be used by men more than the other forms of registration considered here. Finally, women have a significant but slightly higher probability of registering through registration drives than men.

This discussion of gender and registration suggests that the NVRA did nothing to change the distribution of registration between men and women. Women had a higher probability of registration prior to the NVRA and across all forms of registration considered here (with the exception of elections office registration) they have an advantage. Thus, when we control socioeconomic status women have a higher probability of registering to vote than men.

The Impact of Registration Laws

The topic of this project is the impact of registration laws (or at least registration reform) on electoral participation. The goal of the NVRA to increase the size and change the composition of the registered electorate, and its method of doing this is to make the act of registration easier. As discussed, many states had various levels of implementation of NVRA reforms (motor vehicle, mail-in, and public agency registration) prior to the new law. By including dummy variables representing prior implementation of each of the three types of reform we can determine whether or not the implementation of the reform in states which had to make changes to their laws had an effect on the individual level probability of registering under one of three NVRA procedures.

The NVRA does nothing to address closing dates in states without election day registration, thus it is important to explore whether or not closing the registration rolls a specified period of time prior to the election had a negative impact on the probability of an individual registering under one the NVRA methods of registration. Finally, several states delayed implementation of the NVRA (Human Serve, 1996) and it is plausible to expect this could have a negative impact on the probability of an individual registering under on of the NVRA procedures.

Table 6-3 presents the results of the logistic regression models used in this analysis. The first column in Table 6-3 presents the logistic regression for the probability of registration at a motor vehicle office. When we control for social characteristics, closing date, delayed implementation and region, respondents from

Table 5-3
The Probability of Registration by a Particular Method Across Social Characteristics,
Registrations Laws, and Region

	Motor Vehicle	Mailin	PubAg	ElectOff	RegDrive	Pre-NVRA
Age	-.0127	-.0205*	.0106	-.0235**	.0109	.0423**
Age ²	.0001	.0003*	-.0003	.0003**	-.0002	-.0001**
< High School	—	—	—	—	—	—
High School	.7749**	.4570**	-.0530	.4463**	.1964*	.6386**
Some College	1.1421**	1.1296**	-.1068	.9104**	.6707**	1.2113**
BA	1.5079**	1.4936**	-.9341*	1.1457**	.9313**	1.4699**
MA and Above	1.6080**	1.6233**	-.4395	1.4448**	1.0436**	1.7714**
<\$10,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
\$10,000-\$19,999	.1289	-.1192	-.5742**	.3405**	-.0808	.1350**
\$20,000-\$39,999	.3618**	.1417	-1.6686**	.4293**	-.0651	.2544**
\$40,000-\$74,999	.5295**	.3565**	-1.6612**	.5150**	-.0432	.4477**
\$75,000 +	.6703**	.7363**	-2.0661**	.5548**	.1575	.5887**
LOR (< 1 yr)	—	—	—	—	—	—
LOR (1-2 yrs)	-.0041	.1434	.2524	.1682*	.1517	.3055**
LOR (3-5yrs)	-.5902**	-.0553	.1627	.1912*	.0004	.8909**
LOR (5 + yrs)	-.6929**	-.2790**	-.3715	.2125**	-.0724	1.4780**
Unmarried	—	—	—	—	—	—
Married	.1349**	.0511	.0365	.0556	-.0023	.2016**
Male	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female	.1039*	.1748**	1.0720**	.0027	.1658**	.1173**
White	—	—	—	—	—	—
Black	.1350	.0493	.5369**	-.0468	.7931**	.3885**
Hispanic	.2246*	.2799**	.5439**	-.0977	.3933**	-.1259**
Native American	-.3536	.0758	.5207	.3560	.5567**	-.1645*
Asian	-.5725**	-.2287	-4.9566	-.5240**	-.6342**	-.8768**
Act Motor Voter	—	—	—	—	—	—
No Motor Voter	-.3253**	.4411**	-.1293	.0760	.3161**	-.1686**
Lo Motor Voter	-.7373**	.1519	-.0394	.2883**	.4986**	-.1513**
Mail-In	—	—	—	—	—	—
No Mail	-.0606	-.4446**	-.3512*	.2919**	-.0869	.1074**
Agency	—	—	—	—	—	—
No Agency	.1051	-.5522**	.5246*	1.0016**	.2657*	.0761*

Table 6-3--continued

	Motor Vehicle	Mailin	PubAg	ElectOff	RegDrive	Pre-NVRA
Closing Date	-.0009	.0375	.1720*	.0235	*	.0502**
Closing Date ²	.0005	-.0002	-.0042*	-.0012	-.0005	-.0013**
No Delay	—	—	—	—	—	—
Delay	-.4489**	-.4239**	-.2098	-.0020	.3271*	*
South	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northeast	-.0773	.3348*	.3508	.2911*	-.0562	.0518
Midwest	.3673**	-.0408	.3241	.0520	.4179**	-.0096
West	.0252	.5381**	-.5249*	-.4335**	.7846**	-.0743*
Constant	-2.9271**	-4.0333**	-5.8869**	-4.2748**	-4.9257**	-3.4934**
N	21636	21636	21636	21636	21636	61748
% Correct	90%	94%	99%	93%	94%	73%

*p<.05;**p<.01

states which either had no motor voter program or at most a passive program (respondent was not prompted to register) had a significantly lower probability of registering at a motor vehicle office than a respondent in an active state. This is consistent with Knack's (1995) finding that prior to the implementation of the federal law the longer a state had an active motor program in place the greater the effect on turnout. Motor vehicle registration takes time to provide the opportunity to register to a substantial proportion of the voting age population because citizens only visit a motor vehicle about every four years. The longer the program is in place, the more citizens that can be provided the opportunity to register to vote. Thus, it is not surprising that respondents from states which had to make changes to the registration systems in order to implement the NVRA had a lower probability registering at a motor vehicle office than respondents from states with active programs in place prior to the new law. Those states with programs in place, had well established functioning programs in place prior to the NVRA and thus are more likely to register citizens than states with new programs which may not be operating at full efficiency due to the newness of the program.

When we examine the model for the probability of registering through the mail, we find much the same result as for motor vehicle registration. Respondents from states which had no mail-in program in place prior to the implementation of the NVRA had a significantly lower probability of registering through the mail than a respondent from a state with a mail-in program in place. Once again, states with well established programs were more successful at registering people through the mail

than states which had to develop and establish mail-in programs in order to comply with the NVRA. The findings discussed here for the effect of implementation of the probability of registration suggest that as the new programs in the states which made changes to the system to comply become institutionalized across time, these states should increase the numbers of individuals registering through these two methods.

Interestingly, respondents from states which had no agency program prior to the NVRA had a higher probability of registering at a public agency than a respondent living in a state with a program prior to the federal law. It is important to note that prior to the NVRA only Minnesota had an agency program in which visitors were asked to if they wanted to register to vote. Eight other states displayed registration applications in the office no lobby but the office staff did not notify clients about the availability of registration (Knack, 1995). Prior to the federal law we had one state with an effective agency based registration program. After the implementation of the law we have 42 states and the District of Columbia.⁵ Essentially, very few citizens were given the opportunity to register at a public agency prior to the implementation of the NVRA. Therefore, we would expect citizens living in states those which implemented these programs following the NVRA would have a higher probability of registering at a public agency than respondents living in a state with a program prior to the federal law.

⁵ This number excludes (Idaho, Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) which are excluded from the NVRA because of their use of election day registration and in the case of North Dakota no registration at all.

The model for the probability of registering through a registration drive produces interesting results in terms of prior implementation of NVRA reforms. Respondents living in states which had to make changes to the registration systems to come into compliance with the law had a higher probability of registering through a registration drive than citizens living in a state with an active program in already in place. Respondents living in states without an agency program in place had a higher probability of being registered during a registration drive than respondents living in one of the nine states with an agency based program prior to the NVRA. Finally, individuals living in a state which delayed implementation of the law had a higher probability of registering of registering through a registration drive than a respondent living in a state which did not delay implementation. States which would be considered restrictive (or at least moderately restrictive) prior to the NVRA appear to have been targeted by organizations for registration drives. The significance of the delayed implementation particularly suggests that organizations such as Operation Push and the Southwest Voter Registration Education League targeted those states which were either having problems implementing the law or state officials obstructed implementation.

Interestingly, there is no significant relationship between the closing dates and the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office, through the mail, at an elections office or through a registration drive. There is, however, a significant negative relationship between the length of closing date and public agency registration. The longer the closing date of the state the less likely a respondent was

to report registering at a public agency. This analysis gives no hint as to why closing dates have an impact on the probability of registering at a public agency, nor does it provide any information to explain the lack of an impact of the length of a state's closing date and the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office or through the mail. Although, one can argue that motor vehicle registration is more dependent upon the timing of the respondent's birthday (renewal of license) or a relocation rather than the campaign season. Mail-in registration requires elections office to send out registration applications to citizens and thus one would not expect state officials to offer the opportunity to register during the period of time of when the rolls have been closed.

The explanation for the lack of significance for the probability of registration by a drive is most likely simply tied to the nature of the activity. Registrations drive are conducted by organizations to register particular groups targeted by the organization. It is very unlikely that an organization would conduct a drive after a state closed its registration rolls. Thus, we would not expect there to be an effect of closing the registration rolls of the probability of being registered by a registration drive.

The lack of significance for the closing date variable in the model for elections office registration is somewhat troubling in that we expect voluntary registration to be strongly affected by lengthy closing dates. Much of the literature regarding the impact of closing dates on electoral participation suggest they have an impact on participation because they prevent citizens mobilized by the politicized

nature of the campaign season from registering. There is simply no information in this analysis which provides clues as to why the length of closing dates had no impact on the probability of registration at an elections office.

One would expect that respondents living in states which delayed implementation of the NVRA to have a lower probability of registering under one of the three NVRA procedures because the opportunity was simply not there, or at least not there as long as it was in states which did not delay implementation. The results in the Table 3 confirm this expectation. The coefficient for delayed implementation is significant and negative in the models for motor vehicle and mail-in registration. This clearly demonstrates that in those states which either had problems implementing the mandate on time, or had state officials which challenged the law in court reduced the probability of an individual living in one of these states registering under one of the methods. Delayed implementation had no impact on the probability of registering at a public agency.

Region

Southern states traditionally have lower levels of registration and voting than the rest of the nation, largely due to their history of exclusionary politics and lower levels of socioeconomic status. Because of this, most studies of registration and turnout include dummy variables used to compare the south with the rest of the nation. In this project I am interested in whether or not the reform was successful at universalizing registration across the United States. In other words, the NVRA sought to create a nationalized system of uniform registration laws, and it is

important that we examine registration across regions to see where the reform had an effect and where it did not.

When we examine the pre-NVRA sample in Table 6-3 one can see that an individual living in a Western state had a significantly lower probability of registering than an individual living in a Southern state, while there was no difference in the probability of registration between individuals from Southern states and those from Northeastern and Midwestern states. The lower probability of registration for respondents from Western states may very reflect the difficulty of locating and traveling to elections offices in large, less populous Western states such as Wyoming and Montana. We can assume that this is a fairly accurate representation of the pre-NVRA regional breakdown of registration, and thus we can ask how does the post-NVRA regional breakdown differ from this, if it differs at all. Furthermore, we can ask if examine whether not particular methods of registration were more effective in particular regions than others.

When we examine the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office we can see there are no significant differences in the probability of registering at a motor vehicle office for respondents from the south, Northeast, or the west. However, respondents from the Midwest have a significantly higher probability of registering under motor voter procedures than a respondent from a Southern state. Considering that the group of Midwestern states includes Minnesota, Michigan, and Ohio (three states with very well established motor voter programs) and only one Southern state (North Carolina) had an active mail-in program it makes sense that respondents from

the Midwest would have a higher probability of registering through motor voter procedures.

Respondents from the Northeast and west had a significantly higher probability of registering through the mail than respondents of Southern states. This may not be all that surprising considering the most populous states in Northeast (New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania) and in the West (California) all had established "easy" mail-in programs prior to the NVRA while most Southern states had to establish these programs. There was no significant difference in the probability of registering through the mail between respondents from Midwestern and Southern states.

Respondents from Western states had a significantly lower probability of registering at a public agency than respondents from Southern states. There were no differences in the probability of registration at a public agency for respondents from Southern, Northeastern, or Midwestern states. Because most states did not have agency programs prior to the NVRA almost all states had to implement these programs. Based on the results presented here there do not appear to be any regional differences in the effectiveness of this type of registration other than the tendency of respondents from Western states to have a lower probability of registering at a public agency than respondents from Southern states. Unfortunately, this analysis provides no information which would allow us to draw satisfactory conclusions about this pattern.

Respondents from the Northeast had a significantly higher probability of registering at an elections office than respondents from Southern states, while individuals from Western states had a lower probability of registering at an elections office than respondents from Southern states. It is likely that the lower probability of registration for Westerners is a reflection of the tendency of Westerners in the pre-NVRA to register at lower rates than Southerners which can possibly be explained by the distance needed to travel to an elections office in large, less populous states in the west. Additionally, the lower probability of registration at an elections office for Westerners could be related to the higher probability of respondents in these states to register through the mail. Western citizens could simply be taking advantage of the opportunity to register through the mail, rather than traveling to the elections office.

Finally, respondents living in Midwestern and Western states had a greater likelihood of being registered through a registration drive than respondents from Southern states. Obviously organizations conducting registration drives will target specific areas and regions, and thus regional differences in the probability of registration through a registration drive will give us insight into where organizations targeted during the 1995-96 campaign cycle. Based on the findings presented here Western and Midwestern states appear to have been the focus of registration drive efforts.

Discussion

The results of the analysis presented in this chapter suggest that the ability of the NVRA to substantially reduce the tendency of the registered electorate to be skewed toward those of upper socioeconomic status is limited. Motor vehicle registration appears to produce a registered population more skewed toward those of higher levels of education than any other form of registration considered here. In fact, the difference between those of the highest levels of education and those of the lowest is substantially larger for motor vehicle registration than it is for mail-in and voluntary registration at elections office. While the differences between those of upper income and those of lower income are smaller than for education categories the gaps are still larger than either mail-in or elections office registration.

While these results are contrary to the expectations of many supporters, which assumed that motor vehicle registration would reach the broadest range of citizens. Individuals of lower status are much less likely to own an automobile when compared to those of middle and upper status. Furthermore, one can speculate that an individual of lower status is less likely than an individual of higher socioeconomic status to diligently report to the motor vehicle office to change the address on his or her license after moving to a new address. Unfortunately, individuals of lower status are more likely to have a suspended license and are therefore less likely to register at a motor vehicle office. Finally, one cannot dismiss the possibility that individuals of lower status who have never registered to vote prior to the NVRA rejected the opportunity to register when prompted by office staff.

Motor vehicle registration was successful, however, at registering individuals who had lived at their current address for a relatively short period of time. This suggests, that when we control for other social characteristics motor vehicle registration is successful a registering individuals who visit the motor vehicle office following a relocation. Motor vehicle registration was also successful at registering younger citizens.

As expected mail-in registration produced a registered population very similar to that of elections office registration, although contrary to my expectations the population was more evenly distributed across socioeconomic categories than motor vehicle registration. Mail-in registration also appears to have been successful at registering Hispanic citizens and older citizens. Public agency registration was particularly successful at registering young citizens, women, African-Americans and Hispanics. The success of this reform at registering individuals from these low participation groups, is explained by the unfortunate concentration of individuals in these groups as clients of state-aid agencies such as AFDC offices.

The analysis of registration provides the most interesting, although not surprising, results. Individuals registering through a registration drive tended be racial minorities and there was no relationship between the probability of being registered through a registration an socioeconomic. An individual of lower socioeconomic status had as much chance of being registered through a registration drive as an individual of higher socioeconomic status. This suggests, that the targeting of low participation groups such as the poor and racial minorities by organizations

conducting registration drives is particularly successful at contributing to a more socially balanced registered electorate. In fact, in terms of contributing to a registered electorate which is more evenly balanced across socioeconomic and racial categories registration drives and public agency registration are the only forms of registration considered here which were successful.

The analysis in Part II is based on the contention that we now have five forms of registration in the United States (six if one includes election day registration), and each one of these forms of registration will most likely contribute to the registered electorate in different ways. The analysis in the chapter supports this contention. The question then becomes which of the forms of registration considered here will have the greatest effect on transforming the registered electorate? Of the 6397⁶ individuals claiming to have registered after the January 1, 1995 implementation deadline, 2122 or thirty-three percent them registered at a motor vehicle office. Twenty-three percent of the post-NVRA group reported registering at an elections office; twenty-one percent said they registered through the mail; nineteen percent claimed to have been registered by a registration drive and four percent stated they registered at a public agency. Based on this sample, motor vehicle registration should, in part, be considered a success because it is now the number one method of registration in terms of proportion of citizens registered. However, in terms of creating a more socially balanced registered electorate, it is unlikely that motor vehicle registration

⁶ This number excludes individuals under the age of 20, individuals choosing other as the method of registration, and individuals from states exempted from the NVRA (Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming).

will be successful. Individuals registering at a motor vehicle office tended to be of higher socioeconomic status and white, although somewhat younger. In fact, seventy-seven percent of those registering after January 1, 1995 registered at either a motor vehicle office, through the mail, or an elections office. All three of these methods of registration tended to produce registered populations skewed toward those of higher socioeconomic status.

Twenty-three percent of this post-NVRA registered group either registered at a public agency or through a registration drive (nineteen percent for registration drive and four percent for public agency registration). The two forms of registration with the greatest potential for creating a more socioeconomically balanced and racially diverse registered electorate contribute the least the composition of the electorate. The NVRA is certainly a step in the right direction. The reform has registered many lower status individuals and minorities. However, if the trends found in this analysis continue in the long run, the NVRA will contribute to a registered electorate even more skewed toward those of higher socioeconomic status.⁷

⁷ Highton's (1997) work on the impact of same day registration on turnout suggests that the difference in the probability of voting between those of higher socioeconomic status and those of lower status is much smaller in states with same day registration states than it is in states without same day registration. Thus, we can conclude that allowing registration on the day of the election will contribute to a more balanced registered electorate across socioeconomic categories. However, the impact of this reform on the national registered electorate is limited due to the fact that as of this writing only six states had election day registration and North Dakota has no registration system. Furthermore, all of the states with same day registration have rather homogeneously white populations so the impact of election day on the racial composition of the electorate is minimal.

The final question to be answered in this analysis is what is the probability of an individual voting once registered. Thus, the next chapter will examine the probability of voting among registered citizens across method of registration and social characteristics.

CHAPTER 7

THE IMPACT OF THE NVRA OF THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL PROBABILITY OF VOTING

The analysis in the previous chapter suggests that each of the five registration methods considered here contributed to the composition of the registered electorate in different ways. Overall, it appears that NVRA's success in substantially transforming the social composition of the registered was mixed. Individuals registering under these procedures tended be slightly more educated, of higher income, younger, and residentially mobile. Based on the results of this project, one would expect the NVRA to create a registered electorate modestly younger and residentially mobile; however, expectations concerning the ability of the reform to substantially transform the socioeconomic and racial composition of the electorate are probably overstated.

While the NVRA was certainly successful at placing new registrants on the rolls, including individuals of lower status and racial minorities, if none of these individuals participate in elections then the law will have no substantive impact on American politics. It is important, then, that we examine the probability of voting of individuals once registered under these procedures. Can one assume that just because an individual registers under NVRA procedures he or she will participate in an election?

As discussed, prior to the NVRA those individuals who were registered tended to vote at very high rates because they had the resources and motivation to overcome the registration obstacle in order to vote. From this perspective social characteristics such as socioeconomic status and personal attitudes such as political efficacy are much stronger determinants of the probability of registration than of voting (Timpone, 1998). The system of voluntary registration acted as a filter in which individuals most likely to participate overcame the barriers presented by the registration requirement. While the NVRA does not remove the registration filter, by placing the opportunity to register in front of as many citizens as possible the reform attempts to make this filter as penetrable as possible.

As the previous chapter illustrates, we now have five distinct methods of registration in the United States (six including election day registration), and there are different motivational requirements associated with each form of registration. Thus, an individual who sought out the opportunity to register at an elections office most likely did so with the intention of voting. Similarly, an individual who registered through the mail presumably took the time to fill out the application and return with at least a minimal level of motivation to vote. While there is no logical connection between the motivation to vote and the probability of being registered through a registration drive, one can argue that individuals who are asked to register to vote by a political organization are being motivated to vote by the act of registration.

On the other hand, individuals who registered at a motor vehicle office most likely had no real intention of registering to vote when visiting the office. The act of registration was simply a by-product of acquiring or renewing a drivers license or identification card. Thus, the motivation to vote is largely absent from motor vehicle office registration. Public agency registration is similar to motor vehicle registration in that there is no real linkage between the act of registration and voting. Additionally, individuals visiting state agencies such as AFDC or unemployment offices are less likely to possess the resources and attitudes conducive to electoral participation than voting age population at large. The motivation to participate in elections, then, is likely to be absent from this group of registrants.

The task for this chapter then is to examine the probability of an individual voting once registered under one of the five methods of registration considered in this analysis. The analysis will answer several questions concerning the individual probability of voting in 1996.

1. Which of the NVRA procedures (motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency registration) produced the highest probability of voting among its registrants?
2. Are there any substantive differences in the probability of voting between NVRA registrants and individuals registering under more conventional procedures, such as elections office registration or registration drives?
3. Does the probability of voting across social characteristics such as socioeconomic status, race, gender, age, and length of residence differ according to method of registration?

Data and Methods

In order to examine the probability of voting once registered I selected two groups of registered citizens. First, I selected those individuals who claimed to have registered following the January 1, 1995 NVRA implementation deadline. Within this subsample then, I can compare the probability of voting once registered across the five methods of registration considered here (motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency, elections office, and registration drive). Respondents claiming to have registered on election day are excluded from this analysis, because determining the probability of voting when registering on election day is largely uninformative, in that one would expect that an individual registering on the day of an election (assumably at the polling place) to have an almost certain probability of voting. To ensure that individuals living in the six exempt states from the NVRA might misreport registering under a procedure other than election day all respondents from Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming are also excluded from the analysis. Using these criteria, then I have a subsample of 7465 post-NVRA registrants. The second group selected are those individuals who registered prior to the January 1, 1995. In order to use samples as comparable as possible individuals from the six exempted states are excluded from this sample. The pre-NVRA sample includes 46,890 respondents. As with the analysis for the probability of registration, the pre-NVRA sample is used as the baseline of the pre-NVRA registered electorate.

From these two samples then, we can conduct an in-depth analysis of the probability of voting in the 1996 election. We can make comparisons between NVRA registrants and those individuals who registered after January 1, 1995, yet who registered under conventional procedures (elections office, and registration drive). We would expect those individuals choosing to register at an elections office to be similar to pre-NVRA registrants, in that they most likely were the type of individuals (higher levels of education) who were willing and able to overcome the bureaucratic hurdle of registration at an elections office in order to vote. In a sense, we can assume these individuals were making an "investment" in participation. One can ask, therefore, whether or not there are differences in the probability of voting between NVRA registrants and those registering at an elections office after January 1, 1995.

As mentioned, the NVRA included three provisions directly aimed at increasing registration and therefore turnout (motor voter, mail-in, public agency). By allowing the respondent to identify where they registered, these questions allow us to determine which of these three methods was most successful at producing new voters. Additionally, we can compare the voting rates of individuals registering under one these three procedures with those of individuals registering at an elections office or through an registration drive. If the reform is going to be successful in the long run at transforming the social composition of the voting population, the voting rates of NVRA registrants should match those of the "self-registered."

Results

Voting Across Registration Types

The first test in exploring the impact of the NVRA on the probability of voting is a simple comparison of the voting rates of NVRA registrants, conventional registrants (post-NVRA), and pre-NVRA registrants. Figure 7-1 reports the weighted percentages of registered citizens reporting to have voted in the 1996 elections, across the three registration types. Those individuals registering prior to the implementation of NVRA (January 1, 1995) procedures clearly voted at rates higher than NVRA registrants and those individuals registering under conventional methods but following the implementation of the NVRA. Of those individuals who registered before the NVRA era 84.1% reported to have voted in 1996. Of those individuals registering after 1995 73.6% of NVRA registrants reported voting, while 80.5% of those post NVRA conventional registrants reported to have voted. Part of the difference between pre-NVRA registrants and those registering after implementation is most likely due to age. The mean age of the pre-NVRA subsample is forty-nine years old, while the mean age for both the NVRA and conventional registrants is thirty-seven years. We would expect the overall level of voting to be higher among an older population. However, the 6.9 percentage point difference between conventional registrants (post-NVRA) and NVRA registrants cannot be explained by age.

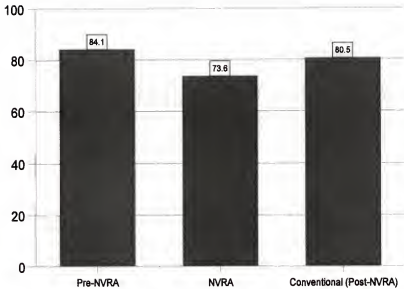


Figure 7-1. The Percentage Reported to Have Voted By Registration Type

The data presented in Figure 7-1 suggest, that those individuals registering by NVRA procedures voted at substantially lower rates than those individuals registering under conventional procedures during the same time period and those individuals registering prior to the implementation of the NVRA. Based on this simple test, then, it is clear that inducing individuals into the voting booth is not as simple as getting them registered.

As discussed, an individual respondent in this study who registered after the January 1, 1995 implementation could have registered by one of five methods: the three reforms provided by the NVRA which are motor vehicle registration, mail-in registration, and public agency, or through conventional procedures which are defined in this paper as registration at an elections office or through a registration

drive. Thus, the exploration of the efficacy of the NVRA in inducing registered citizens in the voting booth must examine the differences in probability of voting for individuals registering under the different procedures included in the NVRA, as well as comparing the probability of individuals registering under one of the two forms of conventional registration considered in this paper. Simply put, I ask what method of registration (motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency, elections office, or registration drive) produced the highest probability voting? While simple comparisons of voting rates as in Figure 7-1 are informative, the probability that an individual will participate in election is influenced by a host of factors such as socioeconomic status, age, gender, race, party mobilization efforts, and region. We must, therefore, place the test concerning which registration method produced the highest voting rates within a multivariate analysis. Because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, logistic regression will be used.¹

Table 7-1² presents the probability that an individual would vote once registered under one of the five registration procedures considered here. Those individuals registering at an elections office have a much higher probability of voting than individuals registering at motor vehicle bureaus (10 points) and public agencies (17 points). Interestingly, the difference in the probability of voting for an individual registering at an election office and through the mail or a registration drive is minimal. The difference between those who register at election office and those who

¹ See Menard (1995).

² See Appendix E for the complete logistic regression used to produce the probabilities used in this analysis.

Table 7-1³
Comparison of the Probability of Voting By Registration Procedures

	Probability	Difference
Pre-NVRA	.87	—
Elections Office	.84	.03
Registration Drive	.83	.04
Mail-in	.83	.04
Motor Vehicle Office	.74	.13
Public Agency	.67	.20

Source: 1996 Current Population Survey

Note: The entries in column one are the probabilities converted from logistic coefficients. They represent the probability of voting for a white woman of average age, with average levels of education, income, length of residence, from a state with average levels of presidential competitiveness, party competition, and campaign spending, in the South. The entries in column two are the difference in the probability of voting for individual of the particular registration method compared to the probability of voting for an individual registration at an elections office.

register through the mail is only one point (.84-.83), which suggests that mail-in registration was successful in inducing new registrants into the voting booth. When we take a moment to examine the nature of mail-in registration when compared to elections office, one can find similarities and thus provide possible explanations for the relatively high rates of participation for mail-in registrants when compared to motor vehicle or public agency registrants.

³ The logistic regression models used to calculate these probabilities can be found in Appendix E.

Elections office registration, as discussed, requires to the individual to overcome the obstacles of time, place, and kind. In other words, in order to register at an elections office, an individual has to travel to a specific location prior to the election in order to carry out a bureaucratic requirement. Thus, individuals, prior to the NVRA, who registered under this method tended to have higher levels of the skills, resources, and motivation conducive to political participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). In a sense, these individuals not only had the ability to overcome the obstacles to voting, but they had the desire to vote, and when the opportunity to vote came around these individuals took advantage of the opportunity (Erikson, 1981). We might call registration with this intention a "politically directed act."

While mail-in registration may be much more convenient than traveling to the registration office, in that the citizen receives a card in the mail, and all he or she has to do is to return that card to the elections office to be placed on the registration rolls. To assume, however, that all individuals receiving voter registration applications in the mail will fill out the card and return it simply because it is convenient may be a less than a reasonable expectation. The data in this study provide no information concerning the motivations behind registration, but we can logically assume that an individual who takes the time to fill out a voter registration application does so with at least some intention to vote. In other words, the act of registration through the mail may be an investment in the act of voting, although less so than with traveling to the elections office.

The relatively high probability of voting for those individuals who reported voting after registering through registration drives suggests that "group-aided" registration (Cain and McCue, 1985) can have positive effects upon the probability of voting. One can argue that mail-in registration produces similar probabilities of voting to elections office registration because motivational similarities of the individuals. In a sense they are both politically directed acts. Registration drives on the other hand, may have produced such positive results in inducing potential voters into the voting booth because the act of asking someone to register during a registration drive is a political act in itself. Simply put, registration drives can be conceptualized as political mobilization, and thus it is possible that the type of individual registering under these procedures are not necessarily the same as those consciously choosing to register, although the effect is the same: casting a ballot.

The lower probabilities associated with registration at motor vehicle offices and public agencies may reflect the nature of this type of registration in relation to voting. Individuals registering at motor vehicle offices and public agencies are registering to vote while undertaking a bureaucratic activity. There is no necessary intention to vote involved when a visitor to a state office fills out registration application in response to prompting by the office staff. It is possible then, that the individuals registering under these procedures and choosing to participate in the election, were those who possessed the resources conducive to participation, and thus, very similar to voters from the other forms of registration.

The information in Table 7-1 is quite informative in that the probability that an individual registering through the mail would vote is about as high as an individual who registered at an elections office. Furthermore, among those registering since January 1, 1995, individuals who took advantage of motor vehicle and public agency registration opportunities had the lowest probability of voting. The information in Table 7-1, however, does not allow us to examine the differences across social groups once registered by various procedures. Thus, in the next section I will examine the probability of voting across social groups and registration types.

The Probability of Voting Across Social Characteristics

Because the voting electorate is skewed toward those of higher socioeconomic status, older Americans, and whites it is important to determine whether or not the NVRA was successful at alleviating the tendency individuals from these groups to vote at rates much higher than individuals from low participation groups such as the young, the poor, and racial minorities. While the aggregate analyses discussed earlier (Martinez and Hill, 1997; Knack, 1998) indicate that the reform had very little impact on the inequality in participation between social groups, we can examine the individual probability of voting to determine whether or not the law was successful at mobilizing certain groups more than others. Furthermore, it is also important that we determine if certain types of registration are more successful than other methods in mobilizing certain social groups.

Table 7-2⁴ presents the relative probability of voting for social groups and registration type.⁵ The cell entries represent the difference in the probability of voting for an individual⁶ of the particular classification and an individual from the excluded classification. For example, among education groups the last number in the first column indicates that a person from the young age group with an advanced degree who registered at a motor vehicle bureau had a probability of voting thirty-three points higher than a person from the same age group with less than a high school education who registered at a motor vehicle office.

Socioeconomic Status

The first section in Table 7-2 presents the probability of voting across registration type for education groups. Among those individuals registering by one

⁴ See Table 3 for the complete logistic regression from which the probabilities in Table 2 are calculated.

⁵ The analyses for education and income groups excludes those individuals registering at a public agency because the small number of individuals with more than a high school diploma claiming to have registered at a public agency.

⁶ As mentioned in the previous section the mean ages of our samples is quite different, with pre-NVRA registrants having a mean age of 49 and post-NVRA registrants having a mean age of 37. While multivariate analysis certainly controls for the possible effects of age differences, the substantial differences in mean age for the two samples could effect other demographic variables related to age. In order to introduce further controls for age into the analysis the probabilities associated for each registration type are calculated for young respondents (represented as an individual 31 years old) and older respondents (represented as 67 years old). The two ages are the mid-points for the two main groups in the study (18-44) and (45-90). Ideally, one would calculate probabilities for individuals for more than two groups such as (18-29; 30-44; 45-64; 65 and above). The decisions to work with two groups is based on two factors. First, 74% of the post-NVRA sample is under the age of 45, and 56% of the pre-NVRA sample is over the age of 45, thus there appears to be a natural division into these two groups. Second, breaking the sample into more than two groups would reduce the number of respondents in each group to the point we could not draw conclusions based on the probabilities with any confidence.

Table 7-2
The Effect of Registration Method on the Probability of Voting
By Socioeconomic Status, Length of Residence, Race and Gender

	Motor Vehicle		Mailin		PubAg		Electoff		Regdrive		Pre-NVRA	
	<i>Age1</i>	<i>Age2</i>	<i>Age1</i>	<i>Age2</i>	<i>Age1</i>	<i>Age2</i>	<i>Age1</i>	<i>Age2</i>	<i>Age1</i>	<i>Age2</i>	<i>Age1</i>	<i>Age2</i>
<High School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
High School	12	7	8	5	10	8	7	5	6	5	12	9
Some College	20	13	15	9	*	*	14	8	14	9	21	13
College Degree	28	17	20	12	*	*	19	11	20	12	27	17
Advanced Degree	33	20	23	14	*	*	22	13	24	14	29	18
<\$10,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
\$10,000-\$19,999	7	5	6	4	8	6	6	3	6	4	3	2
\$20,000-\$39,999	10	7	8	5	*	*	8	5	7	5	5	3
\$40,000-\$74,999	13	9	10	6	*	*	9	6	8	6	7	4
\$75,000 and Above	12	8	10	6	*	*	9	5	8	6	9	5
Residence (<1 yr)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Residence (1-2 yrs)	5	3	3	2	6	6	5	2	3	2	7	3
Residence (3-5 yrs)	5	3	4	2	6	6	5	2	4	2	9	5
Residence (5+ yrs)	2	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	11	5
White	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
African-American	3	2	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	1	5	3
Hispanic	-3	-2	-3	-2	-4	-3	-3	-2	-2	-2	1	0
Male	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	0	1	1	1	1

Source: 1996 Current Population Survey

Note: The entries are the difference in the probability of voting between an individual with the indicated characteristic and an individual with from the excluded category. The Age1 category represents individuals between the ages of 18 and 44 (measured as the midpoint of 31 years of age). The Age2 group represents those individuals between the ages of 45 and 90 (measured as the midpoint of 67 years of age).

of the three NVRA methods (motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency) there is a clear and strong relationship between education and voting. Those with higher levels of educational attainment have a substantially higher probability of voting than those with lower levels of education for both motor vehicle and mail-in registrants. This is not really surprising. We would expect those with the highest levels of education to have a substantially higher probability of voting than those with the lowest level of education. The gap between those with an advanced degree and those without a high school diploma is much smaller for mail-in registrants (twenty-three points for younger respondents and 14 points for older respondents) than it is for motor vehicle registrants (thirty-three points for younger respondents and twenty points for older respondents).

There are at least two possible explanations for these differences. First, it is possible that mail-in registration did a much better job of mobilizing lower status citizens than did motor vehicle registration, but the gap between those of the highest levels of education and those with the lowest is still twenty-three points, suggesting little effect on the differential voting rates between education groups. Second, it is likely that motor vehicle registration produced a more heterogeneous pool of registrants in terms of motivational attributes. Thus, on election day, those motor voter registrants which did turn out to vote most likely were of higher education, and thus greater motivation, while those who abstained were probably of lower educational status.

We are also interested, however, in whether or not there are any differences between NVRA registrants and those choosing to register by more conventional means (elections office and registration drives) and those who had registered prior to the implementation of the NVRA. When we look at the differences in the probability across education groups for those who registered under conventional procedures after January 1, 1995, the tendency of those individuals of higher levels of education to have a much higher probability of voting than those with the lowest levels of education is still present and strong. The effect of education among election office registrants and individuals registering through a registration drive is weaker, however, than it is among motor vehicle registrants. Among elections office registrants the gap between those of the highest educational attainment and those of the lowest for the youngest age group is twenty-two points while among motor vehicle registrants the gap is thirty-three points. The gap in education for elections office and registration drive registrants is essentially the same as it is among mail-in registrants. Among those registering prior to the NVRA, the gap between education groups is, as expected, quite large (twenty-eight points for the younger group eighteen points for the older group). Interestingly, the gap is modestly larger than among those registering by conventional procedures in the NVRA era, but it is smaller than among those registering at a motor vehicle office.

The examination of the probability of voting across incomes groups produces somewhat similar results to the education analysis. Among NVRA registrants the relationship between income and the probability of voting is, as one would expect,

strong and positive. In other words, the higher the income level of the respondent the more likely he or she is to vote, although the gap between those with the highest probability of voting (\$75,000 and above) and those with the lowest probability (less than \$10,000) is much smaller than it is for education groups. The gap between those with the highest levels of income and those with those lowest levels of income is again smaller among mail-in registrants than it is for motor voter registrants.

Moving to conventional registrants, the relationship between income and the probability of voting is also strong and positive. Once again, the gap between those with the highest levels of income and those with the lowest levels is *smaller* for those individuals registering at an election office or through an registration drive than it is for individuals registering at a driver's license bureau and almost identical to the gap among mail-in registrants. Interestingly, registration drives appear to have been somewhat successful in reducing the gap between income groups more among the younger group than the other methods of registration. Among those individuals registering prior to the NVRA the gap is still present, but very similar to elections office, registration drive, and mail-in registrants.

The expectation of many NVRA supporters was that by making registration as easy as possible the gaps in participation between of upper socioeconomic status and those of lower status would be somewhat reduced due to the increased numbers of lower status individuals registered to vote. And the NVRA certainly registered many individuals of lower status, and many of those individuals took advantage of their new found status as registered citizens and voted. However, the information

presented in Table 7-2 when considered in combination with the information presented in the previous chapter suggests that the reform may have led to a slight worsening of the skew in electoral participation toward those of higher socioeconomic status.

The analysis on the probability of registration suggests that the higher the socioeconomic status of the individual the greater the likelihood of registering at a motor vehicle office. The information in Table 7-2 of this chapter suggests that among those individuals registering at a motor vehicle office, there was substantial gap in the probability of voting between those of higher status and lower status, with those on the upper end of the social ladder having a substantially higher probability of voting than those of lower socioeconomic status. Based on the analyses in this chapter and the previous chapter then, motor vehicle registration exacerbates the bias in electoral participation toward those of higher socioeconomic status by creating a registered population that is skewed toward those of higher status and from which those of higher status have the greatest likelihood of voting.

The socioeconomic skew associated with mail-in registration is somewhat smaller than motor vehicle registration. However, when the information in the registration analysis and Table 7-2 are taken together, mail-in registration produces a registered population somewhat skewed toward to those of higher socioeconomic status, and once registered through the mail, those of higher socioeconomic status vote a higher rates than those of lower status. Thus, mail-in registration contributed

to the socioeconomic bias in 1996, although to a much smaller degree than motor vehicle registration.

Length of Residence

The analysis in the previous chapter suggested that when we control for socioeconomic status, individuals living at the current address for less than two years had a significantly higher probability of registering at a motor vehicle office or through the mail than individuals living at their current home for longer periods of time. This effect was particularly strong for registration at a motor vehicle office. As expected, the convenience of NVRA registration was successful at inducing these new registrants into the voting booth.

The information concerning the probability of voting for those individuals registering through a motor vehicle office suggests that for both age groups, those individuals living at their current address between three and five years had a modestly higher probability of voting than an individual living at his or her residence for less than a year. Interestingly those motor vehicle registrants who lived at their current address for more than five years only had a very modestly higher probability of voting than individuals in the lowest tenure group. This pattern is repeated across all the forms of registration considered here. Among mail-in, public agency, elections office, and registration drive registrants individuals living at their addresses for between one and five years had a slightly higher probability of voting than an individual living at their current address for less than a year, and those individuals living at their address for more than five years having no substantively higher

probability of voting than a person with the lowest residential tenure. Notably among, pre-NVRA registrants there is fairly strong and positive relationship between length of residence and the probability of voting.

In the registration analysis we found that individuals with lower levels of residential stability had a greater probability of registering at motor vehicle office or through the mail than an individual who had lived at their address for a longer period of time, while elections office registration tended to produce a registered population slightly skewed toward those individuals with longer tenure in their homes. Yet, when we examine the relationship between length of residence and the probability of voting there are no real differences in the differential voting rates of individuals differing levels of residential stability across registration type. In terms of length of residence, the impact of registration requirements is much greater on the probability of registration than it is for the probability of voting. Even among pre-NVRA registrants the difference in the probability of voting between those living at their address for more than five years and those living at their address for less than one year is substantially smaller than it is for the probability of registration.

The relatively small differences in the probability of voting between those living in their homes less than one year and those with longer tenure suggests that the NVRA indeed may be successful at changing the distribution of the electorate in terms of residential mobility. If both motor vehicle registration and mail-in registration produce registered populations with higher proportions of individuals of lower residential stability and these individuals don't have a substantially lower

probability of voting once registered than individuals who have lived in their homes for several years, then it is likely that the NVRA will contribute to increasing the numbers of those individuals who have lower levels of residential stability participating in American electoral politics.

The findings in Table 7-2 highlight another possibility however. One of the flaws of this analysis is that we have no way of knowing how many of the respondents reporting to have registered after January 1, 1995 were re-registering because of a recent move. Thus, many of the individuals claiming to have registered after this date, and having lived in their current residence less than year may have updated their registration status when visiting a motor vehicle office, through the mail, or at an elections office. One of the intended goals of the NVRA was to make the registration updating process much more convenient for recent movers, and if the data here show that then the law has been successful. However, much of the literature of registration and length of residence suggested that restrictive registration requirements depressed the likelihood of registration (and thus voting) for individuals who moved frequently because of the inconvenience of having to register after every move. Thus, many supporters of the reform hoped the convenience of NVRA procedures would bring about the inclusion of residentially mobile individuals into the pool of *new* registered voters. Unfortunately, the data used in this analysis provide no way of differentiating between individuals registering for the first time and those re-registering.

Age

The registration analysis in the previous chapter suggests that both motor vehicle registration, public agency registration, and registration drives all produced registered population slightly younger than mail-in and elections office registration. The question, however, is whether or not these individuals voted once they were registered. We are particularly interested in whether or not the tendency of older citizens to vote at higher rates was reduced among NVRA registrants or is the distribution of voting similar to elections office registration.

Table 7-3 contains the relative probability of voting across age groups. The relationship between voting and age is very similar across the five post-NVRA forms of registration. Among citizens who registered after January 1, 1995 there is no substantial difference in the probability of voting between respondents from the 18-29 age group and respondents from 30-44 group. Across all five methods of registration citizens between the ages of 45 and 64 had a modestly higher probability of voting than respondents below the age of 30. The difference between the probability of voting for citizens 65 and older and those below 30 is where we find substantive differences across the registration types. The gap between the oldest and youngest respondents was eleven points for elections office registration, while for both mail-in and registration drive registrants the difference was twelve points. Clearly, older citizens had a higher probability of voting than the youngest citizens. However, the gap between these two groups is substantially larger for motor vehicle and public agency. Among motor vehicle registrants the difference in the probability

Table 7-3
The Relative Probability of Voting by Age Group

	Motor Vehicle	Mailin	PubAg	ElectOff	RegDrive	Pre-NVRA
18-29	—	—	—	—	—	—
30-44	1	1	1	1	1	11
45-64	6	5	8	5	5	17
65 and Above	17	12	20	11	12	19

Source: 1996 Current Population Survey

Note: The entries are the difference in the probability of voting between an individual with the indicated characteristic and an individual with from the excluded category. They represent the probability of voting for a white woman, with average levels of education, income, length of residence, from a state with average levels of presidential competitiveness, party competition, and campaign spending, in the South.

of voting between those respondents 65 and older and those below the age of 30 is seventeen- points. For public agency registration the difference is twenty points. Interestingly, the differences for these two groups are very similar to that of pre-NVRA registrants (nineteen points).

Motor vehicle and public agency registration were somewhat successful at registering young voters. It appears, however, that among registrants the effects of age were particularly strong, in that citizens of the oldest age group had a substantially higher probability of voting. The difference between the oldest and youngest among mail-in registrants was somewhat smaller than for motor vehicle and public agency registration, yet the older citizens still had a much greater probability of voting than younger citizens. Thus, while the NVRA may be successful in transforming the age distribution of the registered population (although older citizens had a greater probability of registering through the mail than younger citizens) the

overall effect on electoral politics may be muted somewhat by the tendency of older voters to have a higher probability of voting than younger citizens once registered

Race⁶

The probabilities across racial groups and registration types in Table 7-2 suggest that the NVRA was not successful in its first experiment at mobilizing racial minorities into the active electorate. The information presented in Table 7-2 clearly shows that among pre-NVRA registrants, African-Americans were much more likely to vote than whites (five points for the younger group and three for the older group). However, when comparing this to NVRA registrants, one can see the gap between African-Americans and whites is smaller than it is for pre-NVRA registrants. Among motor vehicle registrants and public agency registrants blacks had a higher (but nonsignificant) probability of voting than whites (three points for the young group and three points for the older group). Among mail-in registrants the gap was even smaller (two points for the younger age group and one point for the older group). Thus, among NVRA registrants the difference in the probability of voting between African-Americans and whites is somewhat smaller than it is among pre-NVRA registrants. Although, the data in Table 7-2 show that among NVRA registrants African-Americans had a modestly higher probability of voting than whites, if the law was successful at mobilizing racial groups equally, we would expect the

⁶Table 3 excludes Asians and Native Americans because there were not enough individuals in the groups to allow for confident interpretation of the probabilities.

advantage African-Americans enjoyed among pre-NVRA registrants would also be apparent among NVRA registrants. Clearly, this is not the case.

Among elections office and registration drive registrants the differences between the two groups are minimal. For both age groups among those registering at an elections office there is only a one point difference in the probability of voting between the groups. For registration drive registrants the gap is slightly larger for the younger group (two points) and the same (one point) for the older group. There do not appear to be any real differences between African-Americans and whites among those registering at an elections office or through a registration drive in the pre-NVRA era.

The results in Table 7-2 for the comparisons of Hispanic and whites is somewhat similar to the comparison between whites and blacks, in that it appears the NVRA had a negative impact on the gap in the probability of voting between whites and Hispanics. When we examine the probabilities for Hispanics and whites among pre-NVRA registrants we can see there is no real difference in the probability of voting among these two groups. However, among those individuals registering after January 1, 1995 whites have a higher probability of voting than Hispanics. Among NVRA registrants Hispanics have a lower probability (nonsignificant) of voting than whites across all three registration types. In fact, the gaps are slightly larger among NVRA registrants than among conventional, suggesting that any effects the NVRA may have on the mobilization of racial minorities was not felt by Hispanics.

The information presented in Table 7-2 suggests that the implementation of the NVRA may have had a negative impact on the relative voting rates between whites and racial minorities. When controlling for SES, blacks tend to have a slightly higher probability of voting than whites (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995), but among NVRA registrants, the difference in the probability of voting between blacks and whites is smaller, suggesting that white NVRA registrants may have taken advantage of the opportunity to vote more so than blacks. Additionally, the gap between whites and Hispanics appears to have been modestly exacerbated by the reform. As with all the findings presented in this study, the results for race are based on only the 1996 and any conclusions based upon these data must be qualified by the fact that any trends might be the result of election specific forces. However, they do suggest that in its first test, the NVRA may have resulted in an active electorate modestly more white than it already was.

Discussion

This analysis has asked a fairly simple question. Once registered, do individuals who registered under one of the three methods provided by the NVRA vote at rates comparable to individuals who registered under the more traditional methods of elections office registration or through a registration drive? The results of the analysis are somewhat mixed. Those individuals who registered through the mail had about the same likelihood of voting as an individual who registered at an elections office or through a registration drive. On the other hand, those individuals registering at a drivers' license bureau or a public agency (such as an AFDC office)

had a significantly lower probability of voting than individuals registering under one of the other three methods.

The explanation for these differences can be found in the nature of the registration procedures themselves and the motivational requirements of the method of registration. In mail-in or elections office registration the individual must have at least some intention of participating in an election, in order to take the time to locate and travel to an elections office (or have the ability to travel to the office) or even to fill out and return a voter registration application. Because of the motivational requirements involved, these types of registration can be considered investments in the act of voting (Erikson, 1981). While registering through a registration drive, is not “self-registration” in which an individual “motivated” to participate in an election registers with the intention of voting, it is nonetheless very similar. In a registration drive, an organization essentially asks an individual to register to vote. By doing this, the organization is in effect mobilizing the registrant. In a sense, registration drives can be considered to “motivate” the individual to participate in the next election.

What all three of the above modes of registration have in common, is not only motivation to participate in an election, but also they are, at least, politically directed acts. When an individual travels to the election office, or an individual fills out and returns a voter registration card, she is doing so with at least some modest amount of engagement with the political world. When an individual is asked to register during a registration drive, the organization is attempting to mobilize that individual into the voting booth. All three are self-conscious precursors to electoral participation.

Motor vehicle or public agency registration, on the other hand, are not connected to the political world or the act of voting in any substantive way. When an individual visits a driver's license bureau or an agency such as an unemployment office, they are doing so with the intention of acquiring or renewing a driver's license of dealing with a public agency in some way. There is simply no intention of participating in an election when an individual visits one of these locations. When an individual registers at one of these locations it is simply a by-product of a bureaucratic activity.

When viewed through this framework, then, the larger gap between those of higher socioeconomic status and those of the lowest status among motor vehicle registrants than among mail-in, elections office, or registration drive registrants is a little less puzzling. Because of the non-political nature of motor vehicle registration, the "motor voter" provision of the NVRA most likely produced a pool of new registrants more varied in their engagement with the political world. Among motor vehicle registrants then, there were probably more individuals who registered with little to no intention of voting and when the election came around, those motor voter registrants who were more engaged in politics turned out to vote, while those with low engagement did not. Thus, among those individuals registering at a motor vehicle office individuals with higher levels of income and education were simply more likely to vote than those of lower status.

In a sense public agency registration was a success from the beginning. In the way we would expect to the "self-selection" of elections office and mail-in

registration to produce a pool of registrants more homogeneous in their engagement to the political world, we would expect public agency registrants to be more homogeneous in their disconnection from the political world. While the probabilities associated with public agency registration are substantially lower than the other methods of registration, nonetheless, any amount of new registrants and new voters produced by placing registration opportunities in public agencies would have to be considered a success.

The results for race are somewhat puzzling. It appears that after we control for socioeconomic status, the slightly higher probability of voting for African-Americans had when compared to whites among pre-NVRA registrants was somewhat diminished among individuals registering after January 1, 1995. Additionally, among pre-NVRA registrants, there were no real differences in the probability of voting between Hispanics and whites. However, among NVRA registrants this gap is larger although non-significant. Thus, it appears in its first test, the 1996 elections, the NVRA appears to have benefitted whites more so than racial minorities.

But, there some good news to be found concerning racial minorities and registration and voting. As mentioned, those individuals who claim to have registered through an registration drive have a significantly higher likelihood of voting than motor vehicle registrants or public agency registrants, and the same probability of voting as an individual registering at an elections office, or through the mail. The gaps between African-Americans and whites and Hispanics and whites are

smaller among those registered through a registration drive than it is among NVRA or elections office registrants. When the data in the registration are taken with the analysis here one conclude that the targeted mobilization of racial minorities through registration drives may have may have been more successful at inducing African-Americans and Hispanics into the voting booth than simply reducing the restrictiveness of registration requirements. The key then to increasing turnout among those of lower status and racial minorities in American elections then, may be targeted mobilization by social and political associations and the two major parties. People *will* vote when asked (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995).

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project was to conduct an in-depth examination of the short-term effects of the National Voter Registration Act. The analysis proceeded on two-levels. The advantage of this two-level strategy is that it allows us to undertake a deep and systematic exploration of the impact of the law on the aggregate and individual levels of analysis. From this, then we gain insight into the overall impact of the reform on aggregate levels of state turnout and the social composition of state electorates. Additionally, the examination of the probability that an individual would register under a given NVRA procedure and the probability the individual would vote once registered under a given procedure, allows us to examine what groups were most affected by the reform as well as providing some predictive insight into what groups might be most advantaged by the law in the future.

The two-level strategy provides an additional advantage. We can view the results of the two analyses in combination in order to determine whether or there is agreement in the findings. In other words, while both the aggregate and individual analyses independently give us a great deal of information regarding the impact of the reform in 1996, we can have greater confidence the findings of the overall project accurately represent empirical reality if there is a consistency between the two the levels of analysis.

For the most part the results of the aggregate and individual level analyses are very consistent. Both analyses show an exacerbation of the tendency of individuals from higher levels of socioeconomic status to participate in elections at greater rates than individuals of lower socioeconomic status. The state level analysis indicated that the implementation of NVRA procedures led to an increase in the overrepresentation of those with higher levels of education and income in the voting electorate. The individual level analysis allowed us to take a much closer look at the differences between education and income groups in registration and voting patterns of registered citizens. The results indicate the higher the level of income or education of the respondent the greater the probability that an would register at a motor vehicle office or through the mail. If we view the impact of the NVRA on the class bias in the 1996 elections then, on can safely conclude that in its first test the NVRA, counter the expectations of many supporters, exacerbated the overrepresentation of middle and upper status groups in the electorate.

The analyses for age groups is somewhat more troubling. The aggregate level analysis suggests that in those states which made changes to their registration system to had levels of participation of participation inequality between age groups substantially lower than groups which did not changes to their laws to comply with the NVRA. This suggests a mobilization of young voters into the active electorate in those which made changes to their laws. However, the individual level analysis produced somewhat mixed results. It appears that there was slight tendency of younger citizens to register at motor vehicle offices and public agencies, while mail-

in registration produced a somewhat older registered population. The voting analysis, however, suggests that across all forms of registration, the older the individual the greater the likelihood that individual would vote. Thus, the individual level analysis does suggest that motor vehicle and public agency registration produced a younger pool of registrants, yet it appears it was the older registrants who turned out to vote election day. This is not consistent with the aggregate finding that states which made changes to their procedures experienced a mobilization of young voters.

Finally, the results of the race analysis are consistent across both levels. The aggregate level analysis produced no statistically discernable impact of the NVRA on the tendency of whites to be overrepresented in the voting electorate relative to other minority groups, although the signs of the coefficients do suggest a slight exacerbation of the inequality between these groups. Similarly, the individual level analysis produced somewhat ambiguous results. While there were some notable differences in the probability of registering under an NVRA procedure between racial groups (I will discuss these in-depth in the next section) there were no statistically significant differences in the probability of voting once registered under these procedures, although the signs of the coefficients suggest that whites may have a slightly higher probability of voting once registered than either blacks or hispanics. Based on the two levels of analysis the best one can conclude about the NVRA and the differential participation rates between whites and other racial minorities is that the reform had very little impact on the tendency of whites to be overrepresented in American electoral politics.

Overall, then, the results of both the aggregate and individual level analyses are consistent. Based on this, we can have greater confidence that the findings of the overall project are an accurate reflection of the actual patterns in the 1996 election. Our confidence, that the findings of this project are an accurate representation of the impact of the NVRA on electoral participation in the United States is limited by the fact this study has only time: 1996. Simply, put the patterns found here could be the result of short-term election specific forces, and thus any conclusions we draw must be viewed with caution. However, we can gain a great deal of insight into the possible future impact of the law by examining the registration and voting patterns produced by each of the forms of NVRA registration considered in this analysis: motor vehicle, mail-in, public agency registration.

The individual level analysis, by virtue of its in-depth examination of the registration and voting patterns associated with each of the three forms of registration included in the NVRA, provides a unique opportunity to speculate about how each method of registration will or will not have an impact on the social composition of the electorate in the future. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a brief re-examination of the results of the individual level analysis in order to take a look at the future effect of the NVRA.

Motor Vehicle Registration

The short-term effects of motor vehicle registration reported here suggest that in its first test the most popular of the provisions of the NVRA was not successful at mobilizing low participation groups in 1996. The most prominent pattern found for

motor vehicle registration is its relationship to socioeconomic status. Most supporters of the reform expected the ease of registration at a driver's license or vehicle registration office would lead to the inclusion of many of individuals from the lower socioeconomic groups into the registered electorate (Piven and Cloward, 1996). The findings of this project, however, suggest that the higher the level of income and education of the individual the greater the probability of registering at a motor vehicle location. Additionally, among individuals registering at a motor vehicle office, those with higher levels of socioeconomic status had a substantially higher probability of voting than individuals of lower status. Clearly, then, motor vehicle registration not only failed in alleviating the socioeconomic skew in electoral participation, it appears to have exacerbated this skew by registering those of higher socioeconomic status, who in turn voted at higher rates once registered.

In terms of the age bias, motor vehicle registration produced somewhat mixed results. Younger citizens, did have a slightly higher probability of registering at motor vehicle offices than older Americans, yet once registered older citizens had a substantially higher probability of voting than younger citizens. In terms of registration then, motor vehicle registration appears to produce a younger pool of potential voters who may be mobilized in a close and competitive election, and who should increase their rates of voting as they age (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980).

Finally, in terms of the inclusion racial minorities motor vehicle was, in the short-term, was not successful. There were no significant differences in the probability of registration or at a motor vehicle office (or voting once registered)

between whites and blacks and hispanics. While we have no evidence that whites were advantaged in terms of registration at these locations (or voting once registered), we can conclude that this provision of the NVRA did very little to alleviate the tendency of whites to comprise a larger share of the registered and voting populations.

As Wolfinger and his colleagues predicted motor vehicle registration was successful at registering individuals with relatively high levels of residential mobility (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass, 1987; Highton and Wolfinger, 1995). In fact, an individual living in his or her current address for less than 1 year had a significantly higher probability of registering at a motor vehicle office than an individual living at his or her current address for more than three years. Based on this finding we can conclude that motor vehicle registration was successful at providing a convenient method of registration for those individuals visiting the drivers license or vehicle registration office after a relocation. Interestingly, among registered voters (from all three types of NVRA registration) individuals living in their homes for less than one year had significantly lower probability of voting than individuals living at their current address for more than a year. Motor vehicle registration then will create a more mobile registered population, but it most likely will very little impact on the voting population.

Motor vehicle registration has the most potential of the forms of registration considered here to transform the registered population across time. Of the 6397 people who reported registering after January 1, 1995 by one of six registration

methods, thirty-three percent registered at a motor vehicle office. If this pattern holds motor vehicle registration will become the most common form of registration in the United States. Based on the results of this project we might expect the registered population to become younger, more mobile, and of higher socioeconomic status.

However, as noted in Chapter 7, individuals registering at motor vehicle offices had a substantially lower probability of voting once registered than individuals registering through other methods discussed in this project (excluding public agency registrants), therefore, the impact of this provision on the voting population is likely to somewhat lessened. Although, this pattern could be unique to the 1996 elections, if it does reflect future trends, the ability of motor vehicle registration to have a substantial impact on American electoral politics is muted by the low participation rates of motor vehicle registrants.

Mail-in Registration

As with motor vehicle registration, mail-in registration appears to have exacerbated the skew in the registered and voting populations toward those of higher socioeconomic status, although the difference in the probability of registration through the mail or voting once registered between those of highest levels of education and income is somewhat lower than the skew found for motor vehicle registration.

While motor vehicle registration appears to have created a slightly younger registered population, mail-in registration created a slightly older registered

population. Additionally, once registered through the mail the older the individual the greater probability that individual would vote. Thus, it does not appear mail-in registration will do much to include younger Americans into the registered or voting populations in the future.

Finally, there were no significant differences in the probability of registering through the mail for whites or blacks. However, hispanics had a significantly higher probability of registering through the mail than whites, although once registered through hispanics had a lower (nonsignificant) probability of voting than whites. Unfortunately, the data in this analysis provide no insight into why hispanics may have taken advantage of mail-in registration more than whites, although it might be possible that states with large hispanic populations conducted some type of outreach programs to their hispanic citizens, or their may have been high profile mobilization campaigns within these states to encourage hispanics to register through the mail.

Mail-in registration was the most common form of NVRA type registration prior to the national implementation of the new law. Thus, we wouldn't expect to see much resulting in these states from this reform, although it is important to examine the patterns in 1996, to see how this form of registration is contributing to electorate. In terms of sheer numbers a much lower percentage of respondents in this study reported registering through the mail (23%) than at a motor vehicle office (33%), and thus we would expect the reform to produce fewer numbers of new registrants. However, the probability of voting for mail-in registrants is substantially higher than

it is for motor vehicle registrants, thus the reform may produce more voters (or at least many) while producing fewer registrants.

Public Agency Registration

The analysis for public agency registration was hampered by the very small number of individuals of middle to upper socioeconomic status reporting to have registered at a public agency such as an AFDC or WIC office. Thus, it was impossible to conduct an analysis of the differential registration and voting patterns across income and education categories. The unfortunate reality that the majority of clients of social service offices are of lower socioeconomic status eliminates the need to examine the patterns across these categories. We know those individuals who registered at one of these locations are of lower socioeconomic status. For example, 72.8% of public agency registrants had a high school diploma or lower, and 80.2% of these registrants had an annual family income of less than \$20,000. Clearly, was successful at registering its target population of lower status individuals.

The findings concerning differences between whites and blacks and hispanics are not all that surprising but nonetheless important. Both blacks and hispanics had a significantly higher probability of registering at a public agency than whites. This is not all that surprising given the unfortunate concentration of blacks and hispanics (and women) as clients of social service agencies. Unfortunately, once registered at a public agency whites appear turned out on election day at modestly higher rates than either blacks or hispanics.

Public agency registration is somewhat troubling. Clearly, reform will bring about the inclusion of racial minorities and those individuals of lower status into the registered population and some of these individuals will turn out to vote. Unfortunately, only 4% of the respondents claiming to have registered after January 1, 1995 registered at a public agency, therefore this method of registration is simply not producing significant numbers of new registrants. Additionally, public agency registrants have the lowest probability of voting than any type of registrant considered in this analysis. Thus, the provision of the NVRA which clearly targets those lower socioeconomic status racial minorities will most likely have the smallest impact on electoral politics. It simply will not produce enough registrants, and among those that do register there are simply too many other obstacles that stand between the individual and the voting booth.

Recommendations

The above discussion highlights the conclusion of this project that, at least in the short-term, the NVRA was not only unsuccessful at bringing about the inclusion of lower status individuals and racial minorities into the registered and voting populations, in some ways it appears to worsened the gap between traditional voting groups and these low participation groups. While these patterns may change in the future as the law becomes more institutionalized and functional on a national scale, many of the findings of this project suggest that long-term effects of the law may reflect the short-term effects. At best the law may fail in substantially transforming the social composition of the registered and voting populations, and at

worst the reform may skew the electoral process even more toward those most likely to participate.

Based on the findings of this study it would be easy to declare the NVRA a failure and suggest we should find a better way to facilitate electoral participation in the United States. In part this true. The better suggestion, however, is to add a further provision to the law: election day registration. Turnout in states which allow citizens to register on election day have higher turnout rates than states without election day registration (Fenster, 1994; Highton, 1995; Brians, 1997). Additionally, there is also a modest reduction in the differential voting rates between those of the highest levels of socioeconomic status and those of the lowest in states with election day registration (Highton, 1995). The success of election day registration in facilitating electoral participation lies in the one-stop nature of the process (Highton and Wolfinger, 1980). Rather than having to register prior to the election (in many states thirty days prior to the election) the unregistered citizen can simply travel to the polling place on the day of the election place their name on the registration list and vote.

The one-trip nature of election day registration erases the inherent differences between registration and voting (Timpone, 1998). Allowing the citizen to register on the day of the election overcomes the difference in time between registration and voting. Registration at the polling place obviously eliminates the difference in place, and finally, by allowing the individual to register and cast a vote at the same place

on the same day combines the bureaucratic act of registration and the political act of casting a ballot in an election.

While the NVRA does make the act of registration much simpler, it does nothing to address the barriers of time, place, and kind. It does not matter if the individual registers at a motor vehicle office, through the mail, or at a public agency, he or she has to register at a location different than the polling place, at a time prior to the location (in most states the closing date is still thirty days), and registration remains a bureaucratic act different from the political act of voting.

Simply put the best institutional reform for increasing turnout and changing the shape of the electorate is to implement election day registration on a national scale, while leaving in place the uniform system of NVRA registration. Prior to the election season individuals who move, come of age, or are clients of social services can register at the most convenient location for them. However, the implementation of election day registration would allow those individuals who may be mobilized by the campaign itself, but are unregistered, to travel to the polling to participate on election day.

It is unlikely, however, that addition of election day registration to the NVRA would bring about turnout levels on par with European countries, nor would it create a completely representative voting electorate. This project has focused solely on the impact of an institutional reform, the NVRA, on electoral participation. And the results of the project suggest that in the short-term the reform did not achieve the goals set forth by most supporters. The explanation for this lack of success is that

electoral participation is the result of the interaction of institutional factors such as the legal context, personal characteristics, political attitudes, and political mobilization. We cannot accurately predict (or understand) participation rates by focusing on one of these influences. We must examine the entire context in which an individual participates if we want to gain an understanding of why he or she does or does not participate in an election. It does not matter how easy the act of participation is if an individual does not have the desire to participate in politics, he or she will not vote (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Additionally, voting is much easier when political elites subsidize participation by actively mobilizing potential voters (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Electoral laws are but one factor in the participation calculus, and this project is just another piece in a large body of literature which suggests that registration is a necessary but not sufficient condition for electoral participation.

APPENDIX A¹

CRITERIA FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF STATES BASED ON THE LIBERALIZATION OF THEIR REGISTRATION SYSTEMS PRIOR TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NVRA

Facilitative System (11 states including WI and ND)

Active Motor Voter; Mail-In (hard or easy); Agency

Active Motor Voter; No Mail-In; Agency

Active Motor Voter; Mail-In; No Agency

Moderate System (15 States)

Active Motor Voter; No Mail-In; No Agency

Passive Motor Voter; Mail-In; Agency

Passive Motor Voter; No Mail-In; Agency

Passive Motor Voter; Mail-In; No Agency

No Motor Voter; Mail-In; Agency

Restrictive Implementation (25 States)

Passive Motor Voter; No Mail; No Agency

No Motor Voter; No Mail-In; Agency

No Motor Voter; Mail-In; No Agency

No Motor Voter; No Mail-In; No Agency

¹ The data used for state classifications were taken from Highton and Wolfinger (1995).

APPENDIX B
CLASSIFICATION OF STATE REGISTRATION LAWS PRIOR TO THE NVRA

	Active MV	Passive MV	Mail-In	Agency	Election Day	Liberalization ⁹²
Alabama	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Alaska	0	1	1	0	No	Moderate
Arizona	0	1	1	0	No	Moderate
Arkansas	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
California	0	0	1	0	No	Restrictive
Colorado	1	0	0	0	No	Moderate
Connecticut	0	0	1	1	No	Moderate
Delaware	0	0	1	0	No	Restrictive
D.C.	1	0	1	0	No	Facilitative
Florida	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Georgia	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Hawaii	1	0	1	0	No	Facilitative
Idaho	0	1	0	0	New	Restrictive
Illinois	0	1	0	0	No	Restrictive
Indiana	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Iowa	0	0	1	1	No	Moderate
Kansas	0	0	1	0	No	Restrictive
Kentucky	0	0	1	0	No	Restrictive
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Maine	0	1	1	0	Yes	Facilitative
Maryland	0	1	1	1	No	Moderate
Massachusetts	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Michigan	1	0	0	0	No	Moderate
Minnesota	1	0	1	1	Yes	Facilitative
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Missouri	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Montana	1	0	1	0	No	Facilitative
Nebraska	0	0	1	0	No	Restrictive
Nevada	1	0	1	0	No	Facilitative
New Hampshire	0	0	0	0	New	Restrictive
New Jersey	0	1	1	1	No	Moderate
New Mexico	0	1	0	0	No	Restrictive
New York	0	1	1	1	No	Moderate
North Carolina	1	0	0	0	No	Moderate
North Dakota	No Registration System					Facilitative
Ohio	1	0	1	1	No	Facilitative
Oklahoma	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive

APPENDIX B--continued

Active MV Passive MV Mail-In Agency Election Day Liberalization92

Oregon	1	0	1	0	No	Facilitative
Pennsylvania	0	0	1	1	No	Moderate
Rhode Island	0	1	0	0	No	Restrictive
South Carolina	0	0	1	0	No	Restrictive
South Dakota	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Tennessee	0	1	1	0	No	Moderate
Texas	0	0	1	0	No	Restrictive
Utah	0	1	1	0	No	Moderate
Vermont	0	1	1	0	No	Moderate
Virginia	0	0	0	0	No	Restrictive
Washington	1	0	0	1	No	Facilitative
West Virginia	0	1	1	0	No	Moderate
Wisconsin	0	0	1	0	Yes	Facilitative
Wyoming	0	0	0	0	New	Restrictive

APPENDIX C
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE INDEX OF INEQUALITY SCORE IN
1996

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Dev
Income Inequality	3.11	18.63	11.67	3.05
Education Inequality	10.91	22.29	15.77	3.04
Age Inequality	9.14	20.34	14.30	2.52
Racial Inequality	.41	17.19	4.21	3.04

N=51

APPENDIX D
QUESTIONS USED TO DETERMINE REGISTRATION METHOD

1) Did (you/name) register to vote after January 1, 1995?

1. Yes
2. No

2. There are various ways people can register to vote. Did (you/name) register to vote when (you/he/she) obtained or renewed (your/his/ her) driver's license, or did (you/he/she) register in some other way?

1. When driver's license was obtained/renewed
2. Some other way

3. How did you register to vote?

1. At a public assistance agency (for example, Medicaid, AFDC, or Food Stamp Unemployment office, office serving disabled persons)
2. Mailed in form to election office
3. At a school, hospital, or on campus
4. Went to a county or government voter registration office
5. Filled out form at a registration drive (for example, political rally, someone came to your door, registration drive at mall, market, fair, post office, library, store, church, etc.)
6. Other place/way
7. Registered at the polls on election day

APPENDIX E
LOGISTICS REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF THE PROBABILITY OF VOTING IN 1996

	Pre-NVRA		Post-NVRA	
	Logistic Estimate	Standard Error	Logistic Estimate	Standard Error
Age	.0746**	.0049	-.0188	.0109
Age ²	-.0005**	.0004	.0004**	.0001
<High School				
High School	.5420**	.0444	.3841**	.0949
Some College	.9795**	.0490	.7771**	.0993
BA	1.4137**	.0596	1.2100**	.1221
MA and Above	1.6092**	.0797	1.5834**	.1951
<\$10,000				
\$10,000-\$20,000	.1395**	.0551	.3492**	.0893
\$20,000-\$39,999	.2779**	.0531	.4858**	.0921
\$40,000-\$74,999	.4466**	.0573	.6275**	.1054
\$75,000 and above	.5404**	.0678	.5804**	.1169
LOR (<1)				
LOR (1-2 yr)	.3736**	.0547	.2442**	.0801
LOR (3-5 yrs)	.5465**	.0557	.2455*	.1020
LOR (5+ yrs)	.6334**	.0461	.0693	.0812
UnMarried				
Married	.2544**	.0329	.0982	.0680
Male				
Female	.0994**	.0290	.0779	.0612
White				
Black	.4221**	.0516	.1398	.1042
Hispanic	.0185	.0665	-.1694	.1147
Native American	-.1509	.1278	-.3573	.2099
Asian	-.4315**	.1042	-.3028	.1933
Elections Office				
Motor Vehicle			-.6213**	.0814
Mail-in			-.0733	.0969

APPENDIX E—continued

	<u>Pre-NVRA</u>		<u>Post-NVRA</u>	
	Logistic Estimate	Standard Error	Logistic Estimate	Standard Error
Public Agency			-.9517**	.1525
Registration Drive			-.0933	.0981
Margin 1996	-.0044	.0031	.0022	.0063
Part Competition 1996	.0066**	.0024	.0045	.0052
# Statewide Races 1996	-.0094	.0268	.0738	.0581
Total Spending	-.00000009*	.000000003	.000000003	
.000000007				
Log of Total Spending	.1440**	.0488	.0803	.1008
South				
Northeast	.3245**	.0610	-.0520	.1325
Midwest	.2828**	.0450	.2040*	.0960
West	.4217**	.0509	.2260*	.0996
Constant	-4.85**		-1.3138	
n	40513		6830	
-2 Log Likelihood	32069.355		6834.584	
% Correctly Predicted	84%		77%	

Source: 1996 Current Population Survey

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note: Age is measured as the actual age of the respondent

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Hill received his Ph.D. (1999) and a Masters of Arts in political science (1996) from the University of Florida. He received his Bachelor of Arts in political science from Stetson University in Deland, Florida in 1994. On September 1, 1999, he will begin a tenure-track appointment as an assistant professor of political science at Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



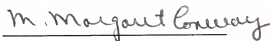
Michael D. Martinez, Chairman
Associate Professor of Political
Science

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



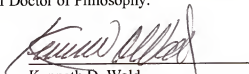
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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



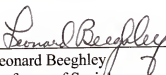
M. Margaret Conway
Distinguished Professor of Political
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Kenneth D. Wald
Professor of Political Science

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Leonard Beeghley
Professor of Sociology

This dissertation was presented to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Political Science in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 1999

Dean, Graduate School